# THE BLUE LION

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

SOLOMON IN ALL HIS GLORY
THE SPORTING LIFE
THE PLEASURES OF IGNORANCE
BOOKS AND AUTHORS
THE ART OF LETTERS
OLD AND NEW MASTERS
IF THE GERMANS CONQUERED ENGLAND
IRELAND A NATION
THE BOOK OF THIS AND THAT
RAMBLES IN IRELAND
HOME LIFE IN IRELAND
IRISH AND ENGLISH
THE PASSION OF LABOUR

# THE BLUE LION

## AND OTHER ESSAYS

BY

ROBERT LYND

("Y.Y.")

It is the privilege of tale-tellers
to open their story in an inn.
SIR WALTER SCOTT: *Kenilworth*

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# THE BLUE LION
## AND OTHER ESSAYS

### I. The Blue Lion

YOU had to stoop as you entered the little harbour public-house that seemed almost darker than the night outside. To go in was to pass from one kind of darkness into another. A gas-jet no bigger than a candle-flame burned behind the bar and helped to light up a small barrel of ninepenny ale lying by the side of a barrel of mild, and a shelf containing a few bottles of whisky and baser spirits. Two tables with long forms beside them stretched down the room, and above the fire-place another small gas-flame shone dimly amid the surrounding obscurity.

The place was empty save for two figures in hats that had been beaten by the weather into shapes that seemed to be as much the work of nature as the shapes of rocks and trees. One of the men, who was sitting at the corner of the bar beside a pint of ale, nodded "Good evening," and asked me how I liked the cold weather. I had only come in out of the cutting east wind, but even so I expressed a doubt whether it was ever really cold in those parts.

He drank a large mouthful and looked at me curiously. "Never cold?" he repeated in amazement. "Gawdammy, I've been out in Archangel in the winter months when bits of men's faces were dropping off with frost-bite, and I never felt so cold as I've felt in this town in an east wind. I've seen a fisherman out at night in one of those herring-boats fainting with the cold—fainting. Gawdammy, it must have been cold enough in Archangel. We had to grow whiskers to protect ourselves. First, the captain—a proper son of a dog he was—gave orders for us all to shave. He was a son of a dog, if ever a man was. Afterwards he slipped on the ice and broke ees leg in two places. By cripes, I wish it had been ees neck. Then the ship's doctor comes along and says he won't be responsible for what happens to us if we didn't stop this shaving, and every man jack of us started to grow a beard—every man but one, Johnny Turner—he keeps the 'Bull' just beyond the market-place—perhaps you've been in it? No? Well, if you go in, you'll see the wownds on ees face that he got through shaving when he was told not to." "Frost-bite?" I asked. He nodded, but I could see from the happy way in which he was smiling that he was not thinking about Johnny Turner but was remembering something about himself. "What colour do you think *my* beard was?" he asked me. I looked at the shrewd, quizzing face above the blue jersey, and guessed "Brown." "You couldn't guess," he said, "not if I was to give you till Christmas." He caught the skin of his throat between finger and thumb as if feeling for a sprouting hair. "That beard

was a wonder," he mused. "Every hair—every little beggar of 'em—came out a different colour. Sixteen different colours my beard was. Gawdammy, you never saw such a beard. Isn't that the truth, John?" He called on another fisherman to confirm what he had said. "Sixteen different colours. It looked more like a rainbow than a beard. You never know what a beard's going to be like till you grow one. Sixteen colours—every little beggar coming up a different colour. Gawdammy, I wish you had seen it." And, upon that generous wish, he gulped down the rest of his pint.

"Some of the men," he continued, while the glass was being filled, "grew prett-y beards. Your brother-in-law, John, he grew a prett-y beard." "A prett-y beard," the other supported him in a deep voice, "a prett-y black beard—as black as a sloan"—which is the local way of pronouncing "sloe." I was doomed, however, not to hear anything further about the brother-in-law's beard, for just then another figure tumbled out of the darkness of the night into the darkness of the bar and said "Good evening" all round as he rubbed his wind-beaten hands and ordered his ale. His hat looked even more a work of nature than the other hats. His sleeves were far too long for his arms. His face, which might once have been handsome, was ill-shaven. His eyes had dark rings under them, but were bright with cunning. He shuddered from the cold he had left outside. "Did you ever feel," he said, stooping and gazing earnestly into the little fisherman's eyes, "as if your face was made of clay—as if"—and he worked his fingers into

his cheeks—" as if you could dig the flesh off the bones of your cheeks with your fingers ? " The little fisherman looked bored and shook his head. " That's what I felt like coming down the road," said the stranger, whose name was Billy Duck ; " I suppose it must be the wind. Like clay. Feel it," he said, and made the fisherman touch his cheek with a finger ; " now it's burning—as hot as a fire." He shivered again, and put his hand into his pocket. He brought out first the money for the beer and then sundry odds and ends and pieces of twine and what looked like the remains of a pair of gold-rimmed pince-nez. Of the latter one glass was gone, rim and all, and the other glass was cracked across the middle. He threw the ruin on to the bar and said to the landlord : " What do 'ee think of that for a pair of glasses, boss ? " The landlord glanced at the ruin and said : " Are they gold, Billy ? " " Solid gold, Mr. Evans," Billy assured him, taking up the twisted metal fondly ; " hall-marked, and as fine a pair of reading-glasses as ever set on a man's nose. Look here," he said, and bringing out a packet of Player's cigarettes he read the print on it through the cracked glass, keeping his other eye tightly shut. " Try it for yourself, boss," he said, and passed the glass to the landlord. The landlord took the glass over near the gas-jet and he, too, read the print on the cigarette packet with one eye shut. " I can read quite clearly," he nodded, impressed. " You'll never read clearer," said Billy, swelling with pride ; " they're a perfect pair of glasses, only they're broke." " Billy's a great scholar," the landlord informed me with the faint shadow

of a wink ; " you're always reading, aren't you, Billy ? " " I could read all day," Billy agreed. " About wild animals," he added, ready to elaborate the theme ; " I was reading in the paper to-day about the pole-cat that escaped from the Zoo." " You're fond of animals ? " I asked him. He put his face into mine and whispered hoarsely but confidentially : " I've been a poacher all my life."

Then as if to give other proofs of his love of animals, he went on : " Did you know this, sir : whatever animal you shoot, you've got to shoot it in its own way? If you're shooting a badger, you mustn't shoot it here "—and he touched his cheek—" or in the leg "—and he touched his leg—" or it will spoil the skin. You must shoot it here "—and he showed me his jaw-bone just half-way between the chin and the ear. " Then you skin it like this," and he made slicing movements down his neck and stomach, and other movements as if he were dragging the skin off his body. " Even a 'oss or a cow," he declared earnestly, " you have to shoot in its own way." " Go 'long, Billy," said the landlord ; " what do you know about it ? You've never shot a horse." " I've shot hundreds of 'em," declared Billy—" 'osses that had to be killed," he explained to reassure us. " How would you shoot a horse, Billy ? " the landlord's wife asked him. Billy took off his hat and hung it on the corner of the open door. " That's the 'oss's head," he said. Then he borrowed my stick and put it to his shoulder like a gun. He drew up towards the hat, till the ferrule of the stick was touching that part of the hat which apparently

represented the horse's ear. Looking along the stick with one eye shut tightly, he clicked with his tongue and pulled an imaginary trigger. He nodded grimly as he handed back the stick. "It's dead," he said, and reached up for his hat. "And how would you shoot a cow, Billy?" the landlord's wife asked him. Billy paid no attention to her, but, full of his subject, turned to the landlord again. "Tell me this, Mr. Evans," he asked him; "do you know the right way to shoot a donkey?" Everybody laughed, but Billy signed to them to be silent. "You don't shoot a donkey the same way as you shoot a 'oss or a cow," he told them earnestly, with the outstretched finger of an orator; "and do you know why? A donkey's brains"—and he tapped the back parts of his head—"is behind his ears." There was another burst of laughter, but a new-comer quietly said, "Billy's quite right." Billy nodded his gratitude. "You shoot a donkey here," he told us, touching his face close to the eye.

All sorts of mocking questions and comments followed. "How do you shoot a giraffe?" "In the neck, I suppose." "How would you shoot a camel?" "How would you shoot a flea?" Billy turned away in disgust, and said to me in an aside, "There's no use talking to people that hasn't brains. If you mentioned a rattlesnake to them they wouldn't know what you were talking about." "How would you shoot a lion, Billy?" the landlord's wife teased him. "Well, Billy's not afraid of lions anyway," said a young townsman; "did you ever hear," he asked me, "how Billy went into the lion's cage?" "And won ten pounds," Billy

added. "It was in a menagerie," the young man said; "tell this gentleman about it, Billy." Billy sniffed a deep sniff, shuffled his shoulder into an easier position, and began. "The menagerie," he said, "came to this town sixteen years ago last June, and bills were stuck up all over the place advising that ten pounds was to be presented to any man who would let himself be closed inside a cage along with a savage lion from Africky. It had been up and down England, and not a living soul could be found that wasn't afraid to go inside the cage with the lion. Now it's my opinion that a man has no need to be afraid of any animal, wild or tame, and I said I would go into the cage. They tried to frighten me, but that was because of the ten pounds." "You're a regular hero, Billy," said the landlord. "I went into the cage," said Billy, like a man soliloquizing under a spell, "and fixed my eye on the lion like this." He knitted his brows and gazed at an imaginary lion in the corner. "Then I did this," he said, jumping up and down in his clumsy boots and growling and making passes with his arms as though he had a sword in each hand and were ready to leap on the lion and stab it with both. Enjoying the memory of his great exploit, he cut and slashed the air of the bar-room with his arm like a second Sergeant Troy, uttering an occasional minatory growl, though I cannot help thinking that what must have scared the lion most was the flourishing of his boots as they clattered up and down on the floor. "The lion," he told me, pausing breathless for an instant in his pantomime, "retreated, cowering and growl-

ing, into the corner of the cage "—he pointed realistically towards the far end of the bar-room—" watching me out of the sides of his eyes. But I never took my eyes off him and went at him again like this." And once more he began poking his arms with savage thrusts at the unseen lion, and dancing up and down in his boots. " Then, when the time was up," he concluded, " I walked slowly, slowly backwards like this, still with my eye on him "—and he imitated a man discreetly moving backwards from a lion—" got to the door, fired off two blank cartridges from a revolver, and out of the door, click, like that. After that, there was a collection, and I had my hat full of money." He took it off to show me the inside of it—alas ! now empty. " The next town they went to, they didn't offer any ten pounds," he observed sarcastically. " And, when they did offer it afterwards, the only other man that had the courage to go into the cage had his head bitten off by the very same lion. It was all in the papers. Isn't that so, Mr. Evans ! "

After that, I had a pint with him, and said " Good night," but he followed me to the door. " I could get 'ee a badger's skin, if you wanted one," he whispered hopefully. " Are there many badgers round here ? " I parried him. " Hundreds of 'em, fousands of 'em," he assured me. I told him I would think over it. " I could get it in two days ; I might be able to get it to-night," he urged. But I did not really want a badger's skin, and moved away from him. He caught me by the sleeve and whispered, " You haven't got a spare half-crown on 'ee ? " Well, he had earned it.

## II. The Shy Fathers

IT is difficult to refuse a child's invitation, even when it is to attend the breaking-up ceremony at a school. At first, I pleaded shyness; but my niece said with a pout, "That's what all the men say. Elizabeth says her father's shy, but she's simply going to make him come; and Ann's father says *he's* too shy, but Ann's going to make him come, too. Why should all the fathers be shy?" "I don't know anything about the fathers," I told her; "I can only answer for the uncles." "Well, why should uncles be shy?" That, I confess, bowled me. "Oh, well," I said, "I'll come along with the shy fathers."

I admit I should not have gone if I had not been fairly sure that the shy fathers would be there in considerable numbers. The thought of being present in a large schoolroom, with no other man present, in the midst of a throng of far from shy women and children, I find terrifying to the imagination. It is not that I dislike the company of women and children: on the whole, I think it the best company in the world. But, as Bacon has said, a crowd is not company, and the loneliness of a man entirely surrounded by women and children surpasses even the loneliness of a man isolated in the middle of the Sahara. Apart from this, however, I think there are several reasons for the shyness of

fathers when they are pressed by their children to go to a breaking-up party. The average father, I suspect, is afraid of what his children's school friends may think of him. He knows that, by the grace of God, his own children do not see him as he really is. They play games with him as with an equal. They laugh at least at some of his jokes. They appear at times to regard him as the richest, the bravest and the cleverest man in the world. Has not one boasted of one's own father? I remember at the age of eight boasting to a bosom friend that my father was a multi-millionaire. He had boastfully said that his father had a million pounds. I said that my father had three. And, for all I knew, it might have been true. A child, indeed, is reluctant to believe that there may be fathers in the world superior in any way to its own. A friend of mine, an occasional writer of mediocre verse, was referring to some story about Blake the other day, when his ten-year-old daughter interrupted him to ask who Blake was. "Oh, he was a genius—wrote 'Tiger, tiger,'" said her father. "Was he as big a genius as you?" inquired the little girl. "Good gracious, you mustn't call me a genius!" he told her. "*I* think you are," she said, gently but firmly. "Why"—he explained the situation—"I couldn't write 'Tiger, tiger,' if I lived to be a thousand." "I would rather have 'Oh, Bonar, Bonar, why thus dishonour?'" she told him, quoting the first line of a set of atrocious political verses he had written. Of such is the kingdom of Heaven.

I do not, I may say, suggest that a father

never sees the little waves of criticism stealing into his child's face, or that he has any reason to fear that his child is likely, for any long period of time, to mistake him for a god. He knows that the process of finding him out may be a slow one, but that it is cumulative and that it is sure. But he also knows that his child, as a rule, overestimates him in a way in which no other child would. That is why, when he is asked to submit himself to the critical eyes of his children's schoolfellows, he feels suddenly shy and apprehensive. No man may be able to add a cubit to his stature, but he has an uneasy suspicion that the eyes of other people's children may be able to take several cubits off. Even so, I do not think that it is mainly an injury to his vanity that the shy father fears. After all, if other people's children do not like him, he can always avenge himself by disliking them twice as much. It is chiefly on his children's account that he feels shy. Being sentimental, he feels—or pretends to feel—that he is unworthy to be the father of such wonderful children, and he shrinks from saddling them with a second-rate parent in presence of their friends. He must look, he tells himself, an odd sort of fish, and though, heaven knows, all the other fathers of his acquaintance look as odd sorts of fish as you could wish to meet, still he does not like the notion of an odd sort of fish being seen in public as the father of these particular children. He would hate to see his children appearing in ridiculous clothes; he hates equally the thought of their appearing with a ridiculous parent.

There is, I am told, no greater happiness

known on earth than that of a father who, after a party to which his children's school friends have been invited, can lie back in his chair and tell himself that he did not behave so badly after all. It is always pleasant to pass an examination, but there is no examination which it is a more blessed relief to pass than an examination by one's children's friends. Fathers have told me of the nervousness they have seen in their children on such occasions—of the impatient expression they have observed on the little face that, at a joke that has no point or that has a point that nobody is able to see, tells them of the silent soliloquy: "Daddy being silly again!" Pity the tremors of children for their fathers. Pity the tremors of fathers for themselves. Happy is the child whose father acquits himself with credit in the presence of its friends. How delightful it was in one's childhood to see one's own father being a success in such trying circumstances! One cheered in one's soul as he, habitually a silent man, awoke out of his silence into the most fascinating conversationalist, made jokes that were good jokes, and told stories of his experiences that were better than a book. There was no personal triumph to surpass the triumph of having such a father as this. To see the faces of one's friends brightening made, I am sure, one's own face bright. Some children, on the other hand, even children who are devoted to their fathers, accustom themselves from an early age to the knowledge that their fathers are imperfect creatures whose faults must be put up with as the decree of destiny. I knew one boy whose father, an excellent and interest-

ing man, had the fault of talking too much and of telling a story at twice the length at which it ought to have been told. The boy never showed the slightest irritation, as many boys would have done. When the father had lost his bearings in the middle of an apparently endless anecdote, the boy would merely say, with a smile, " Ring off, governor ! " and turn the conversation to another subject. It is not in every home, however, that the long-winded elderly and the impatient young are on such good terms as to be able to face such a situation, not only once, but again and again, without getting to dislike each other. I should myself have been tempted to play the Roman father in such circumstances. For a man may forgive many wrongs, but he cannot easily forgive anyone who makes it plain that his conversation is tedious. " We can forgive those who bore us," said La Rochefoucauld ; " we cannot forgive those whom we bore." It was, I suppose, my sense of the enormity of the implied accusation that made me, even in the midst of an unusually long anecdote, always sympathize with the long-winded father even more warmly than I agreed with the " Ring off, governor ! " of the boy.

I cannot say that I set out for the school with any intention of making my niece proud of me, but I was buoyed up by the hope that I should not actually disgrace her. As a matter of fact, I do not think there was any chance of disgracing her, unless one had risen from one's chair and made a scene. The shy man usually finds that he has been shy without a cause, and that, in practice, no one takes the slightest notice of him. Sitting in the back row against the wall,

indeed, I could watch the children, all costumed as for the stage, going through their dances, their songs, and their plays in almost complete self-forgetfulness, without even troubling to look round to see how the shy fathers were getting on.

To see a play performed by small children with a few footlights arranged on the floor in imitation of a theatre, is to feel that all that the saints have said about children is true. How exquisite are their voices, that are all music without the harshness of experience! To listen to them is like listening to the first birds. To see them is to be back in a world of apple-trees in flower. There is comedy in the contrast between them and the grave parts they play and the grave speeches they utter as abbesses, poets, and harpers. But the very mimicry of our grown-up world, which begins by moving us, ends by filling us with bitter-sweet regret that the lives of men and women, after all, are not enacted in voices so sweet and by creatures so fair as these. The feeling may not be a deep one, and may be only for the moment; but, for the time at least, we wish with a pang that life could always have remained like this, that nobody would ever grow up or die, but that the very kings and admirals and prime ministers and thieves and shopkeepers were all children. It may be that, from the point of view of those who have passed into further æons of existence, kings and admirals and prime ministers and thieves and shopkeepers are so. Who knows but that, in immortal eyes, a conqueror marching from ruined kingdom to ruined kingdom may be but a small boy with a toy sword at his

side? After all, the grey-haired and the bald play their parts in almost as complete innocence of what they are doing as these children, who at least know that it is all a game. And, indeed, the contrast between a child of twelve and a grown-up human being is scarcely greater than the contrast between a child of five or six and a child of twelve. I had never realized the enormous gap between six and twelve till a band of little six-year-old dancers came on to the stage with solemn feet and solemn faces and went through their steps in the middle of a half-circle of girls, none of whom was older than twelve and none younger than ten. Kings, Puritans, Cavaliers, mackerel-sellers, and cut-purses of twelve seemed six feet high in comparison with these midget elves. They, too, seemed infinitely small and of a perfect age when they were on the stage alone, but the children of six had only to appear in order to let us see that there was an age still nearer perfection. Not that I should care to be dogmatic on this point. It may be only a passing ripple of sentimentalism that makes one wish that all the world were of so doll-like a stature as this, and that the very editor of "The Times" were a little fellow of six. There are others, perhaps, who would regard the little elf of six as a giant compared to the sleeping infant in long clothes—the infant in the comet stage, as Meredith saw it. The child in the cradle is, for many people, the eternal Sleeping Beauty, and, if one may judge by religious art, it is the age that to men of imagination has seemed most divine. I confess I am content with six—nay, with seven, or eight, or nine, or ten, or eleven, or twelve.

And, perhaps, there may be something to be said for any age up to sixteen, or even twenty, or, at a stretch, thirty, and if you advance the age to forty I shall not quarrel with you. There is, within these limits, no year that would not be better if it lasted at least three years; but I am not sure that, at the age of six, a year should not last ten. It may be that if all these children, six and twelve alike, had not been doomed to grow old, I should not have been so moved at the spectacle of their grace and the sweet sound of their voices. And if I myself had remained at their age, I might only have squabbled with them and seen some of them not as angels but with a hostile eye. Hence all may be for the best in the best of all possible worlds, and it may be that to be an uncle appears as wonderful a destiny to a little girl of ten as to be a little girl of ten seems to an uncle. In any case I shall tell my niece that I think the perfect age is not six, but ten. An uncle has only one duty—to make himself popular with his nephews and nieces.

## III. Fear

I AM afraid of so many things that I ought not to have been surprised, on taking rooms in a little cottage in Buckinghamshire, to find myself living in terror of the landlady. I was afraid to be late for breakfast, afraid to be late for lunch, afraid to be late for tea, afraid to be late for supper—she resolutely refused to cook me a hot dinner—and a little nervous even of being late going to bed. I do not think she meant to frighten me, for she was an honest, Christian woman, but she liked having her own way. She even compelled me to eat what she liked. In a sense, she always allowed me to choose, but I always found that in the end I had to choose exactly what she had chosen that I should choose. "What about lunch to-d'y, sir?" she would say to me, lingering in the doorway, a large, dark, smiling, intimidating figure, after she had put the breakfast on the table. I weighed the rival charms of various delicacies in my mind, almost tasting them as my thoughts lingered on them. Then, as my wants are of the simplest and I wished to give the woman no trouble, I would suggest tentatively: "What about a roast chicken and apple tart?" Her eyes with the dark rings under them would be quite expressionless as her massive head began to shake on her massive shoulders with a faint wobble of doubt.

" I've got a nice bit of cold 'am," she would say meditatively, fixing me with her eyes and turning up the corners of her mouth in a joyless smile. As I did not really care much, I said: " Good! Cold ham and apple tart will do splendidly." Again her face lengthened, and the massive head once more began to shake from side to side with a faint wobble on her massive shoulders. " I'm afryde I can't do pystry," she said mournfully. " Got no time," she explained, dwelling on the last word with emphasis and raising her voice as she uttered it. And then she would add, with a sickly smile of reproach at me for forgetting what I ought to have been old enough to remember: " There are only twenty-four hours in a d'y, y'know." " Oh, well," I would say, a little shamefacedly, " make whatever gives the least trouble." She became almost winning at that. " Wot do you s'y to a little stewed rhubarb? " she would entice me, her hand still on the handle of the door. " Splendid! " I told her. " That's right," she said, nodding as if in approbation of a child that had been naughty and was now good; " stewed rhubarb and shype." Now, though not particularly fastidious about food, I can honestly say that I almost hate blancmange, so that I said to her hurriedly: " Oh, don't trouble about the shape. Stewed rhubarb will do splendidly." She became almost genial under the sacrifices I was making, one by one, to her convenience, but she absolutely refused to accept this one. " Oh, you shall 'ave your shype," she told me, wagging her head jocularly as she disappeared through the doorway. And I did.

# Fear

One of the great disadvantages of being a coward is that one is constantly having to eat things that one does not wish to eat. One is not free from this necessity even at home, if one happens to be afraid of the servants. I remember, during the war, being very much afraid of a cook who was at once so brawny and so mysterious that we suspected her of being a deserter from the army disguising himself as a woman. One thing was certain: she was not a cook. At least, she did not know how to make soup. She did not know how much salt to put in; she did not know how much pepper to put in. And, as a result, each of us was confronted at table with a bowl of hot and greasy water, which first scalded the lips, then pickled the tongue, and, finally (so lavish had she been with the pepper), scorched the throat, so that at the end of the first spoonful everybody was breathing like a dog on a hot day. Now, it is easy enough for one person to get out of eating soup. All you have to do is to explain that you have been forbidden soup by the doctor. A cook cannot consider that an insult, and she may even sympathize with you as an invalid. This soup was so bad, however, that even our guests (of whom there were two present) seemed unwilling to go on with it, and it would obviously have been impossible to persuade the cook that a large number of men, women, and children, under forty, were all such dyspeptics as to have been forbidden soup by their doctors. To make such a pretence would have been hardly less insulting than to ring for the housemaid and tell her to take the stuff away. This being so, there was no alternative but

to dispose of the soup in some manner other than by eating it. Luckily, there was a second scullery in the house, and, though in order to reach it one had to go along a passage which would be visible to watchful eyes in the kitchen, there was a faint hope that the cook might not be looking. See us, then, one by one, guests, children, and all, tiptoeing along the passage, trembling in fear of demon eyes, each carrying a little bowl of soup, pouring it as quietly as possible down the sink, and hurrying furtively and feverishly back to our places at the table. How happy we felt when we were all safely in our seats again, our empty bowls before us, without having suffered a single casualty! To have outwitted the cook and the housemaid in this fashion seemed at the moment the supreme triumph of our lives. When the next course arrived, though I have no doubt it was as vilely cooked as the first one, we were so hilarious as a result of the success of our stratagem that we ate it as though it had been ambrosia. Fortunately, after a few days, the cook had stolen so many things that she decamped, leaving as little as she could but a memory of prodigal pepper behind her. Even to-day, when I think of her, I find myself gasping gently.

It is one thing, however, to make away with a bowl of soup in one's own house and quite another thing to make away with a blancmange in lodgings. I thought at first of opening the window and throwing the blancmange into a thick bush. I would have given it to the birds if I had been sure they would eat it. Then I considered the possibilities of the fire. If I could only have been certain that blancmange

was one of those things that burn quickly! I pictured to myself, however, the little flat, white dome of blancmange still slowly sizzling on the top of the logs when the landlady came into the room to clear the things away, and I had not the courage to face the situation. Even if I were to beat it with the poker, I knew that I could not beat it so as to make it look like anything but blancmange. "Wy, wot 'ave you been doing to the fire?" the landlady would have said; and I am not one of those silver-tongued people who could have charmed her into believing that the blancmange had got there by accident. You may wonder why I did not wrap it in a piece of paper and throw it into a field later in the afternoon, but, though such a course is possible—and has even, I believe, been taken with rabbit and with suet pudding—it seems to me alien to the spirit of blancmange. If I were to put a parcel of this kind in my pocket, I should be sure to forget it. In the end, I braced myself to the inevitable. I ate the blancmange. It was even worse than I had feared; but it was not so bad as offending the landlady. After that I tried to avoid any recurrence of "shape" by standing out against all invitations to "choose" any kind of stewed fruit for any of my meals. My landlady might try to allure me with, "Wot would you s'y, sir, to a few stewed pru-ins?" but, guessing that they would be served with "shape," I assured her warmly that all I wanted was biscuits and cheese.

By an evil chance I fell a victim to the landlady's wiles again one day when, as we held our usual after-breakfast conversation, I happened to remark that I supposed she was kept fairly

busy all the year round. "Oh, yes," she said, taking up the bacon dish, "I'm gen'rally pretty full." She nodded sagely. "People know where they'll be comfortable," she assured me; "they soon find out where they can get good food—good food and good, plyne cooking," she added, without even the shadow of a smile. She lowered her voice to a confidential tone and a brightness came into her face. "I tell you wot some of 'em like," she said—"a nice boiled suet pudding with a little nice treacle. Wy, you 'aven't 'ad it yet, I don't think! No. Just fancy! Wy, wot *can* I have been thinking about? I tell you wot, sir, you shall 'ave a little treat to-d'y. Yes, you shall 'ave it—a nice little boiled pudding with some nice treacle." It was in vain that I protested that I was a man of few needs and besought her not to give herself unnecessary trouble. "No trouble at all," she assured me; "and, if it is, well, once in a w'y, wot does it matter? Life's myde up of troubles," she added; and, as she swept out of the room, I could hear her murmuring, mechanically, "Yes, you shall 'ave it." And I did. When it appeared I confess I once more looked longingly at the fire, but again the thought that either the smell or the sizzle of a slab of burning pudding would betray me to the landlady frightened me. I was so demoralized by this time, indeed, that I should have felt guilty even if I had done the thing up into a parcel and taken it away to hide it in the woods. I had no will, though plenty of wish, left. Therefore, I ate a slice of the pudding, and congratulated the landlady on her cooking. "That's right," she said, as if commending a

child for swallowing a dose of medicine; "you shall 'ave it agyne." And I did.

Now it is a curious fact, worth the notice of psychologists, that, if I went back to that neighbourhood again, I should go back to the same landlady, simply because I should be too great a coward to go anywhere else. I dare not pass her door if I stayed at a rival lodging-house. I should be afraid that she might be looking out of a window or standing at the gate, thinking things she was too civilized to say. And this fear of landladies, I believe, is not at all uncommon. I have known men who were very uncomfortable in their lodgings but who went on living in them because they had not the courage to give notice. When I was a boy, I knew an old gentleman who used to say the most ferocious things about his landlady behind her back, but who was all smiles and obeisance as soon as she came into the room. He was in the tea-trade and had a square beard and scandal-seeking eyes and walked with his toes turned out so far that his feet progressed sideways in the fashion to which Charlie Chaplin has since accustomed us. I used to meet him at "high tea," for he lodged in the same house and had his meals at the same table as a medical student who was a great friend of mine. The old gentleman used to sit at the head of the table, and as soon as the landlady had disappeared would denounce her because of the draught that came in under the door and swept round his ankles. He declared that he would leave if she did not have this remedied. Then he would pour himself out a cup of tea, and, after the first sip, would begin muttering an

ever-increasing stream of blasphemies. "If I have told that woman the right way to make tea once," he declared, wrathfully, "I've told her a hundred times. You can't make good tea without first rinsing the pot with hot water. She knows that as well as I do, but she won't do it. I sometimes wonder whether she's only a lazy slut or whether she does it to annoy me." He angrily dipped his spoon into the cup and removed several floating tea-leaves. "I don't like either to hear or to make use of strong language, Mr. Lynd," he said, with the hairs of his eyebrows bristling, "but that woman's a bitch." She came into the room at that moment with a butter-knife she had forgotten. The old man's aspect changed in an instant to a smirk of greeting. "I was just looking for the butter-knife, Mrs. Triggs," he would say to her, with a nervous snigger; "thank you very much." Then, when she had left the room, he would cock an eye at us, half in fear and half in hope, and say: "Do you think, did she hear what I said?" Even if she had heard him, however, I do not think she would have turned him out—she despised him too much to care what he said. I have never heard greater contempt in a woman's voice than on one occasion, when the medical student suggested that Mr. Brown might one day marry and leave her. "And who under God," said she, as though the suggestion were that of a lunatic, "would marry *him*?"

Poor man, I used rather to despise him myself. Since then, however, I have lived in lodgings in Buckinghamshire, and, looking back on him, I love him as a brother.

## IV. The Nuthatch

'TIS the voice of the nuthatch. He is standing on the bough of a bare oak, plume-shaped as an elm, in the middle of the wood; he is standing on a small stump on the crook of the bough. A few minutes ago he had swept through the tree-tops to his perch, blowing his whistle all the way—a whistle that had the gaiety of a laugh, a holiday-maker's tootle of warning to all the birds of the air to clear out of his path, a sort of "Hi, hi, hi! I'm coming," as though all the world were a circus. He then lifted up his long bill and, pointing it to the sky, called "Whoo-ee! Whoo-ee! Whoo-ee!" several times, till the little shadow of his partner shot out of nowhere and settled on a branch above him. She ran along the branch and then flickered down to a hole high up in the stem of the tree. She did not enter the hole, but worked her way round and round it—for she can walk in any direction, even upside down, like a fly—working with her bill, as though she were attempting to build a neater or a narrower entrance to the nest. Her work finished, she flew away again, and again she returned and ran round and round the door of her nest, pecking and dabbing assiduously, while her mate still lifted his face to Heaven and whooped her praises. "She does all the work," I murmured to myself; "but, ah!

how faithful he is ! " It was obviously an ideal marriage, for not only was she very industrious but he was very beautiful. I have seen a small kingfisher modelled in painted wood for German mantelpieces, and the nuthatch was not unlike this, as he stood on his perch, with a head and beak and neck too big for his body and the charming blue and cinnamon and grey of his feathers. Not that his many colours can match those of a living kingfisher: but they can match those of a painted toy.

He is no longer a gay figure just now, however, and his song has changed from triumph to a timid wail of warning. His voice no longer rises in the " Whoo-ee ! " of the king of the woods, but falls in a " Whee-*oo* ! " as plaintive as the call of a chicken that cannot find its mother. It may be that he has cast his eye earthwards and caught sight of us standing under a dark grove of pines and watching his home with the obtrusive secrecy of private detectives. Or it may be that he has cast his eye skywards and caught sight of the starling that is sitting like a coal-black shadow and making sucking noises in the roof of the tree. Starlings, they say, are thieves and steal the nests of nuthatches if they get the chance. Possibly the nuthatch's mate is working all the more desperately in order to make the opening of the nest too narrow for the starling to enter. Meanwhile, what can the male do but make a noise ? The wood is full of his lamentation.

The next day, when I get back from town, I am met by two children with murder in their eyes. They have seen the starling going into the nuthatch's nest, and they call for guns,

bombs, knives, stones, bows and arrows, or any other weapon of destruction, in order to maintain justice among the birds. Strange that humanitarianism should lead to thoughts of bloodshed! But that, I suppose, is the way in which we are made, and, after all, shall a nuthatch be allowed to suffer while there is a child to take its part? I confess I, too, was indignant with the starling, short of doing anything to hurt it. If I could have thrown a stone at it and missed it, while giving it an effective fright, I should certainly have done so. And, twenty-four hours later, we should all have been sorry. For, on our arrival under the oak, we found to our amazement the starling fluttering out of the nesting-hole and the nuthatches slipping back through the trees with the tin-whistle of triumph and resuming the operations of the first day. Whatever the starling had done, it had not disgusted them with their nest, and, indeed, the female nuthatch flew to the hole, walked in and remained there for a time out of sight, while the male on his perch shouted as though he were happier than a wren. She came out after a little, and ran along a branch like a woodpecker, and no sooner had the pair of them made off again in search of food or material for the nest, than the solitary starling was once more sitting, a black and ominous form, in the tree-top, dropping down to a lower branch, darting across to the branch on which the nuthatch had perched, and flying straight into the hole where the nest was. There was nothing to be seen of it for some time, and no sound of the returning nuthatches. Then it protruded a yellow beak from the hole and

moved it from side to side, like a housemaid peering up and down the street from an attic window. Suddenly, the loud, clear-the-way whistle of the nuthatch came nearer through the tree-tops, and the starling hurriedly flew out and took up its position in a neighbouring tree, leaving the rightful owners in possession of the nest. They certainly showed no resentment or hostility on their return: the male chanted and the female went silently on with her work as usual, ultimately disappearing into the nest and taking the place vacated by the starling. It was almost too exciting. It was also extremely bewildering. "Perhaps," suggested the elder child, "the starling is a friend they have asked to look after the children." "Or perhaps," she added, as a second possible solution occurred to her, "the hole is only the front door, and the starling has a nest above the nuthatches, like the Dashes living in the flat above us." The nuthatches went and the starling came, the starling went and the nuthatches came, and we discussed the matter in all its possible aspects. "Suppose," said the younger child, "the starling is sitting on the nuthatch's eggs, and helping to hatch them, will the children be partly nuthatches and partly starlings?" "Oh, yes," it was suggested; "probably a new sort of bird—the nutchling." "No," declared the elder child, firmly, "the starhatch."[1]

It is a remarkable fact that April never returns but some particular bird seems to dominate it with its song and colour and to be

[1] Alas! when I returned a fortnight later the nuthatches were gone, and the starlings in full possession.

chorus-master or leader of the birds for the season. This may partly be because I do not always see the spring in the same district, but I do not think that is the whole explanation. This—in one district at least—is April of the nuthatches. They outshout the whinny of the green woodpeckers—those runaways that hide their many colours in their flight among the trees, save when the sun shines on them. Nature, alas! is for the most part fugitive. The woods are filled with voices that dwindle as the monstrous form of a man is seen to approach under the trees. Woodpecker and jay and blackbird dodge round bush and tree in their flight, as though they were pickpockets in a crowd under the eye of a policeman. Only a few of the birds stand their ground up to a point in the presence of man—the robin, the wren, the chaffinch, the thrush, and the willow-wren, tremulous as the head of a Chinese idol as it sings its delicious song on a spray on the far side of the silver birch. And many even of these bold birds, though they are public in their song, are as secretive as can be about their nests. There is nothing in which the birds differ more from man than the way in which they can build and yet leave a landscape as it was before. Let a thousand men set up their houses in a wood, and the wood becomes a hideous small town. Let a thousand birds settle in the same wood, and it will take a skilled eye to find twenty of them, save for the black patches made by the rooks in the elms. Had man but this power of building out of sight, how delightful a piece of nature would be the home counties of England! But man is a

violator of fields, a pillager of forests ; and his houses, instead of allowing the eye to slip past them almost unconsciously, and rest on green prospects, bid the eye " Halt ! " and make all else invisible. How kind are the birds in comparison ! Here in this wood it is as if birds had rained down from Heaven, such a multitude of them are singing in birch and on bramble, in oak and in ash. But even a single mossy nest in the fork of a tall holly-bush is a morning's discovery. I doubt if birds would attract us as they do if it were not that they appeal in this way to our curiosity and lead us on from little discovery to little discovery. There are only a small family, and one might imagine that a man could know all that there is to be known about them at the end of a year or two. But there is no end to discovery while there is a wren's nest with its tiny door to be found in a new place—perhaps in a crack in a flint wall that a school of boys passes every day without seeing. And the birds, more than any other visible thing, awaken our curiosity by bringing a never-ending variety into the appearance of the world. There is a willow growing at the edge of a duckpond : we pass it twenty times, and the willow and the pond are still. We pass it again, and a little brown sedge-warbler is swaying from branch to branch of the willow just above the dirty water, and precipitating himself in short flights over the surface of the pond. He catches a gnat, stumbles in the air, and hurries back to his post. It is as though a new willow and a new pond had been created. And a bird a little bigger than your thumb is the master of the scene. By the edge of the road, a little further on, is a

rotting oak strangled with ivy. Twenty times you pass it with scarcely a glance, but the next time there is such a chattering, screaming, and fluttering in the branches that you can no more pass it without stopping than you can pass a fight in the street. "They're mobbing an owl," says the wise child; and it is as if every bird of the air had been called on for its aid. A chaffinch is there, a robin is there, a thrush is there. None of them seems to be attacking the owl directly, but each of them is hopping about excitedly and inciting the others to attack him. Even this, however, is noble enough, for the only bird who is in immediate danger from the owl is the thrush, who has built his nest in the tree. The others are but allies—volunteers in a Holy War. I doubt if the owl is in any danger, had he but the wisdom to know it. But in the end either he cannot endure the noise or he is terrified by it, and he dives softly out of the tree and across a field, the thrush alone pursuing him, beak to tail, while the other birds remain behind and utter loud shrieks of encouragement. Here, again, for an instant the world has been made new. Each day some tree or hedge or copse comes to life as if for the first time, and we are present at a scene that will never recur. The row of firs in the wood has been still and silent every day but one. On that day alone a gentle wind was shaking the seed-scales out of the cones, and all the chaffinches in the county were tumbling somersaults as they pursued the winged seeds through the air and caught them in their bills. What a flicker of bright dresses they brought into the gloom of the grove—a gloom that has fallen

upon it again and ever since possesses it in the grey east wind!

And yet, for all the birds, who would praise the spring? The east wind has been too persistent, and, though the English birds sing because it is April, those other birds that have come from the staring sun of Africa cannot sing as though they were happy while everything is grey. The chiffchaff, whose song is like a song hopped on one foot, is loud in the top of an occasional birch, and there is a willow-wren with a wave of song in every tenth tree. But the world is still a prison and there will be better songs when the sun shines, and the spotted lizards come out on the dead bracken, and the orange-tipped butterfly no longer flutters on its way in solitude. Meanwhile, there is the nuthatch; may his whoop never grow less! And there is the landlord of the inn, whom I heard the other night denouncing the gipsies who had settled with their caravan on the common. "Thieves?" he said, and thumped the bar in answer to a question. "They would steal the laces from the shoes of Jesus Christ!"

## V. Cigarette Pictures

TO collect bus tickets or tram tickets is of all the pleasures of the town child probably the most permanent. Tops have their season, and so have marbles, but bus tickets are a solace that lasts all the year round, like eating and drinking or auction bridge. No one knows when the collecting of bus tickets first began, but, if we cannot put the date quite so far back as the time of Hengist and Horsa, we may reasonably assume that the custom is a very old one, and that it comes down to us from an age that was still steeped in the mists of folk-lore. The child who collects bus tickets offers even to-day an entirely mythical explanation of his curious business. He believes that, if he succeeds in getting together a million of these tickets, there is somewhere or other a nameless and benevolent figure—master of the universe of the streets—who will reward him with a hundred pounds. No one has ever known a boy who was paid a hundred pounds for a million bus tickets; no one has ever known a boy who had the strength of character or the steady unintelligence to collect a million bus tickets; no one can tell us the address of the benevolent, if somewhat ironical, power, who has never yet written that cheque for a hundred pounds. The myth, nevertheless, persists, turning the children of the towns into useful little

scavengers, where otherwise they might have been mere brewers of mischiefs, an expense to their parents and a trouble to the State. Thus does Nature deceive her progeny into good works. Even as a dead mouse or a dead sparrow is removed from the landscape by a horde of assiduous burying-beetles, so is the daily refuse of decayed bus tickets removed from the surface of the streets by swarms of incredibly active children for whom they are a prey. It is one of the most serious arguments against birth-control that, without a good supply of children, it will be impossible to prevent the streets from becoming littered inches—nay, feet—nay, yards—deep with discarded bus tickets. Of such delicacy, as Professor Thomson has often pointed out, is the texture of the web of life ; and babies are but one link in a long chain of which the end is a blue bus ticket with a hole in it lying in the dust of the gutter at the foot of Highgate Hill.

This collecting habit, when once formed, however, was bound to be extended in the course of time in all sorts of other directions that served no similarly useful purpose. At the present moment it seems to me, the custom of collecting cigarette pictures has reached a point that threatens the very existence of the older and more reputable habit. It has grown to such a point, indeed, that I myself am compelled day by day to purchase and smoke far more cigarettes than are good for me in order to appease the insatiable appetites of two small children who have a fancy for the pictures of motor-cars. Let me warn any man who has a niece or nieces in these times not to allow them

to know that he smokes. I cannot speak for nephews; the only nephews I possess are separated from me, I thank God, by leagues of salt water. It is said that nephews are even worse than nieces, but nieces are bad enough. For one thing, they compel me to smoke a brand of cigarettes that I do not wish to smoke. I am rather a faddist about cigarettes, and, having a peculiarly sensitive throat, I like to humour it with cigarettes of an expensive kind, in which the paper has been chosen with as costly a care as the tobacco itself. Besides, I am getting on in life, and I have read that the paper used in the manufacture of cheap cigarettes gives off a poison—called, I think, carbon monoxide—that leads to fatty degeneration of the heart. After prolonged search I had at last discovered a few months ago the shop in Piccadilly where I could buy the cigarette that suited my throat perfectly, and that left me at the end of the day without any suspicion that there was anything the matter with my heart except that it was too big, and was taking part in some kind of a race. Unfortunately, the maker of this excellent cigarette, being old-fashioned, did not realize that a box or packet of cigarettes without a picture is, as people say, like "Hamlet" without the Prince. As a result of this, there sprang up a coldness between my nieces and myself, and at the end of a few weeks it became clear that I must choose between the cigarettes I liked best and the nieces I liked still better. The will of man being weak, the victory fell to my nieces, and it is now more than two months since I have dared to buy a packet of cigarettes that did not

contain the picture of a motor-car. I have often intended to write to the manufacturers of my nieces' favourite cigarette, and ask them if they can give me some assurance that the paper they use does not contain the poison that was mentioned at the inquest on the cigarette-smoker last year. If it does, I fear I am undone, as I have to keep going like a furnace all day in order to be able to buy yet another packet of cigarettes to see whether it contains the picture of a motor-car that is not already in my nieces' collection.

There is, as you probably know, a series of twenty-five of these pictures, and great is the joy of the child who possesses them all. I have, I cannot help thinking, been extremely unfortunate in the packets I purchased, for instead of getting a different picture in every other packet, I seem to get the same few pictures over and over again. I am afraid the younger of my nieces, who has all the outspokenness of eleven years old, is beginning to despise me. Nowadays, when I open a new packet, I take out the picture and hand it to her in trepidation. "Oh, bother. Another Rolls-Royce!" she says, throwing it contemptuously on the top of the rest of her collection. I am so chop-fallen on these occasions that I sometimes suggest that we should go out for a walk, and we dive together into tobacconist's after tobacconist's, and buy one packet of cigarettes after another in the hope of getting something richer and rarer than a Rolls-Royce. Alas! too often, when the picture is produced, it is but a signal for the child to groan out: "A Ford! A Ford!" in a voice of horror and

despair, and in horror and despair I straightway plunge into another shop to emerge, if luck is with me, with a Morris-Cowley or a Calcott, or even, as on one glorious occasion, with a Hispano-Suiza—a car of which, to be quite frank, I had never heard before.

By these methods, my nieces and I have got together a collection that is slowly but surely nearing completion. We are still a few pictures short of the noble twenty-five, but if only I can keep on smoking hard enough and long enough my nieces are confident we shall have them in the end.

In the meantime, they amuse themselves by playing all sorts of games with the pictures they already possess. They apparently treat the motor-cars as children at school, and themselves as the mistresses. If I demur to the notion that motor-cars can be children, they explain: "Oh, they're motor-car children," in a tone that makes this seem altogether reasonable.

One of the simplest of the games in which the motor-cars take part is known as Turning Up. A handful of cigarette pictures, all face downwards, is raised above the head and allowed to flutter, like a company of starlings, to the ground. Every picture that falls with its face upwards gets a mark, and the game is won by the first picture to score twelve marks in a series of throwings. I asked my nieces if the motor-car child that won the game was given a prize. "Oh, yes," said one of them, "we give it a college." As it was clear that I did not understand, she explained that pictures of the arms of the colleges of the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge were given away with

another brand of cigarettes and that these made ideal prizes for the young motor-cars. "They look just like medals," she declared; "they're lovely." The next game I saw them playing was called Going Furthest. Each motor-car in turn was thrown as far as possible across the room, and the winner was, of course, the one that lay farthest away on the floor. Some of the cards lay on their faces, some on their backs. "You see those numbers on their backs," said my elder niece—for every picture in the series of twenty-five has its number—"those are the children's ages." She pointed to a Calcott that had fallen near my feet. "Look," she said, "Calcott is twenty-one." "But children," I protested, "can't be twenty-one." "I know they can't," she said, laughing, "but they are." And, in a world that has accepted the theory of relativity, I saw no reason for disbelieving her. "There's dear little Rolls-Royce," she observed, pointing to another card; "he's twelve." "You're a snob," I told her; "you like him because he's expensive." "I don't," she declared; "I like him because he has such nice yellow wheels." She would not admit that she ever cheated in the game in order to make her favourite motor-car win, but she went so far as to agree that her sister always put a little extra energy into her throw when sending a Vauxhall or an Armstrong-Siddeley across the room. I was rather puzzled by the fact that of some of the cars there were five or six pictures, and I asked if each of these pictures was a separate child or if they all counted as one child. "They're all different, of course," I was told. "But how can you tell

one from another?" "Oh! we mark them with strokes, and give them names. We call the first Lanchester 'Lanchester,' the second one 'Lank,' the third 'Chester,' the fourth 'New Lanchester' and the fifth 'New Lank.'" And during the next five minutes I must have been instructed in the name of every single child of the scores of children that were lying about the floor.

On other occasions I have seen more elaborate games than these played by the motor-cars. One of them is Golf; another is called Dropping on Object. Golf is a little difficult to explain. The motor-car child taking part in it is given a match, representing a golf-club, and a coloured bead representing a ball. On the floor, at a distance from each other, are a piece of india-rubber, a marble, a match-box, a paper-weight, a reel of cotton and other things, which represent the holes. The game is played by a niece who takes a motor-car holding one of the matches, and strikes the bead so as to make it hit the piece of india-rubber and the other objects in succession. Every motor-car is allowed three shots at each object. If it fails to make the bead hit it in three, it has to go back and begin from the beginning again. This game takes an entire wet afternoon to play. Dropping on Object is somewhat simpler. The same objects —the india-rubber, the reel of cotton, etc.—are placed in a ring, and a niece, standing up, drops a motor-car from a height with the intention of hitting each of these objects in turn. A motor-car is allowed three shots at each object. If it does not hit an object in three shots it is disqualified.

Though I have never played any of these games myself, I am attracted to them in a way in which I never feel attracted to the terrible game of recognizing motor-cars, which is played by my nieces whenever I go for a walk with them in the streets or along a country road. Being of an informative cast of mind, I always try to interest my younger relatives in the birds and flowers and other natural phenomena to be seen by the way. But if, going along the edge of a wood, I say to one of my nieces nowadays, "Did you see that Lesser Spotted Woodpecker?" she is sure to reply, "No, but look at this beautiful Armstrong-Siddeley coming down the hill." And if I say, excitedly, "Hullo, the first cowslip!" she hears wheels approaching and exclaims, "Oh! what a darling little A.C.!" Heaven knows, I was not even aware, a few months ago, that half of these makes of motor-car existed, and they seem to me a poor enough substitute for the breeds of hens, cows and horses of my own childhood. O that men had never learned to smoke so that children might have remained ignorant of the names of such monsters! The only consolation that I find when I reflect on the matter is a purely philosophic one. It is that children make their favourite games from the most ordinary things, and that even the poorest child in its play has the materials at hand for building its Paradise. The poor child may be stinted in food, in education, in fresh air and most of the comforts and opportunities of life. But, as they play at their make-believe games, the children of the rich and of the poor are equals. I doubt if any game played with

costly toys gives half the delight of the games that can be played with pictures collected from packets of cheap cigarettes. . . . I am afraid however, that, as a result of an attack of smoker's throat, I am growing sentimental.

## VI. The Sweep

OWING to the sweep's being in the house, I have been reading the New Testament. The sweep was brought in because two professional singers—at least, men who begin singing after breakfast and have not always stopped singing at midnight—have come to live for a few weeks in the flat overhead. As a child, I used often to pay a shilling in order to sit in the gallery and hear a professional singer. At present, I would gladly pay a ten-pound-note if the gift of song were suddenly withdrawn from every animal bigger than a bird. I am as tolerant of music as most men ; I can listen to a canary singing in a saloon-bar as patiently as anybody, and, if I wish it were somewhere else, it is only because it is in a cage. The human voice is different, however. It is not content to be a gentle squeak or a pretty whistle. Ever since composers have made the mistake of attempting to express the more vehement passions in music, singers have taken to roaring and bellowing, like a fat man calling for the police in a nightmare. I have never been able to understand why love should make such a noise when it is translated into music. In real life lovers whisper ; they murmur ; they seldom raise their voices except in a quarrel. Let love turn from conversation to song, however, and a man will yell " I love you " as

though he were megaphoning information about boxers to an audience of ten thousand in the Albert Hall. This is very distressing to those of us who wish to preserve the decencies of love. It is still more distressing to flat-dwellers. I am confident a great composer will one day appear who will realize this and who will invent love-songs that are inaudible outside the room. Love that comes through the ceiling is not love, but savagery. And, indeed, we might say the same of most of the passions. Even the quarrels of civilized people are not audible to the neighbours. Those who follow the art of singing do not, unfortunately, seem to understand that the great emotions are all private. A passion—from the point of view of the audience—should not be published but overheard. Hence I would advocate a new art of silent song—at least of song that could not penetrate through the ceiling of an overworked writer's study. It is not that the young men in the flat above me sing badly. I fancy—though I am no judge—that they sing fairly well. But, if they were John MacCormack himself, I would pray them to be silent for at least twenty-one hours out of the twenty-four. If they only played the piano I should not much mind, for one can work to good music played on the piano. But song is distracting, especially when it is merely do, re, me (or whatever it is), howled over and over again, with sudden pauses and then once more, as though every note were addressed to the sun and moon. There will come a day, I feel certain, when a singer will be condemned to be hanged on his own vocal cords as a public

warning. Meanwhile, I have vacated the study, and gone into another room where the singing reaches me only faintly and, indeed, seems scarcely louder than the noise made by the hooters of the steamers in London Docks at the coming of the New Year. "Let's get the spring cleaning over while the room is empty," I said. And with that we sent for the sweep.

It was not the sweep who told me to read the New Testament. Indeed, I did not even see him, and, if I had, I should probably not have spoken to him. Much though I honour the profession of chimney-sweeping, and though my favourite lyric is one in which Shakespeare makes a charming reference to it, I do not think I have ever exchanged two words with a sweep in my life. As a rule, he comes too early in the morning for conversation—at an hour at which honest men are much more likely to be just gone to bed than just out of it. Even so, I have admired him since childhood. He was the first man I ever saw who looked like a foreigner. The very brush he carried over his shoulder looked like a foreigner with a fuzzy head brought back as a prisoner from battle. How white his eyes looked in his black face, how red his lips, when he smiled! There was never a nigger minstrel to equal him. Until I had seen a sweep, I did not realize that a black man could be like anything but the Devil. The only black man I knew was in a picture in "The Pilgrim's Progress," and he was a figure in my nightmares. How different is the genial face of a sweep! He brings comedy even into a dream. I once dreamed—or did I only dream that I dreamed?—that I married a sweep's

daughter. He was a perfect father-in-law, who used to come to dinner parties with his black face and his brushes on his shoulder, and, as he swung round to talk to a lady on one side, the lady on his other side used to have to duck her head in order to avoid collision with the brushes.

Those were merry parties. The sweep enjoyed them thoroughly, and so did I. I preserved my illusions about sweeps, I think, right up to the Great War. It then became mournfully clear that sweeps, instead of being comic characters with a smile for every housemaid, were hard-headed men of business who took care of the pennies like any small shopkeeper. They fought pitched battles with householders for the very soot that came down the chimneys. The householder, having for the first time in his life taken to vegetable gardening, subscribed to a gardening paper, which discoursed to him from week to week on the uses of soot as though it were next in value only to gold. He saw his lettuces falling one by one a prey to slugs, but, having read the hints to amateur gardeners in his paper, he rubbed his hands and said, "Wait till the sweep has been." What was his wrath to discover that the sweep insisted on taking the soot away with him. He concluded, very naturally, that the soot, having come down his chimney, belonged to him, but the sweep retorted that the soot, having been carried away by him in a bag from time immemorial, was his by prescriptive right. If my memory does not play me false, there was a lady who brought the matter into court for a decision. I do not remember how the

case went, but in the end, I think, the average householder found himself bribing the sweep not to take the soot away with him at a cost of about sixpence a bag. I have never felt the same towards sweeps since. When the sweep called on Tuesday, I was not sorry to miss him. Meanwhile, the housemaid had cleared my desk in readiness for him and removed the books and the papers and the letters and the bills to a table in the next room. It was while rummaging among the books for something to read that I found a modern translation of the New Testament by the Rev. James Moffatt. I took it off to bed with me, turned on the light, and began to read the Gospel according to St. John.

It may be that, when I read it again, I shall like this translation into contemporary English, but I confess that, on a first reading, it shocked me. It is apparently the theory of the translator that, in order to realize the effect produced by the Gospels on the people to whom they were originally addressed, we must translate them into the commonplace prose of everyday life. I do not myself see why, if the New Testament is to be translated into modern prose, it should not be into the prose of Mr. Belloc rather than into the prose of Gipsy Smith. When Jesus says to the woman taken in adultery, "Go, and sin no more," as he does in the Authorized Version, he seems to me to be talking English as modern (if not more so) as that in Mr. Moffatt's translation, "Be off, and never sin again." I doubt, indeed, if even a modern street-preacher would in such circumstances use the phrase, "Be off,"

any more than he would use the phrase "Hop it," or "Skedaddle." Similarly, it is surely as near good modern prose for Jesus, at the tomb of Lazarus, to cry, "Lazarus, come forth," as to exclaim, "Lazarus, come out!" The one preserves the dignity of the occasion, the other does not. Nor does "Jesus burst into tears" bring the awe of the scene before us as does the traditional "Jesus wept." Even when the translation does add a little to our understanding of the original, it often does so at the expense of the imaginative meaning of the words. Here, for instance, are a few parallel passages from the Authorized Version and the new:

| | |
|---|---|
| Our Father, which art in Heaven, Hallowed be Thy name, Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. | Our Father in heaven, Thy Name be revered, Thy Reign begin, Thy will be done on earth as in heaven. |
| The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened. | "The Realm of heaven," he said, "is like dough which a woman took and buried in three pecks of flour till all of it was leavened." |
| I am not come of myself. | I have not come of my own initiative. |
| Then took Mary a pound of ointment of spikenard, very costly, and anointed the feet of Jesus. | Then Mary, taking a pound of very expensive perfume, real nard, anointed the feet of Jesus. |
| In my Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. | In my Father's house are many abodes; were it not so, would I have told you I was going to prepare a place for you? |

| | |
|---|---|
| Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her. | Mary has chosen the best dish, and she is not to be dragged away from it. |

The vice of this new translation is not merely commonness. It is positive mistranslation, because instead of translating us into the world of Jesus and his followers it translates them into the world of the modern inexpert novelist. The translator has forgotten that the rhythm of a sentence as well as the individual words carries the meaning to our imaginations—that even colloquial prose must have rhythm, as it has in John Bunyan, if it is to move us with a sense of the mystery of life, or of eternal truth. Religion above all things takes us into a world in which rhythm of speech is more natural than examination prose. For the world of religion is almost as foreign to our common world as is the four-dimensional world itself. All the great hours of life, indeed, are foreign to our daily existence of use and wont. Every time we enter the presence of death, we go into a strange place that does not exist on the map of the world we lived in a week before. The prose writer can make us understand the significance of these strange worlds only by the use of rhythm. He can uncreate the present world so that it gives place to a finer one by the secret enchantment of music. The world of Jesus, whatever view we take of it, is remote from us. We cannot bring it to London: the moment we enter it, London disappears. The makers of the Authorized Version have given us a magic carpet on which we can travel to it in the twinkling of an eye.

If a modern version is ever to take its place, it, too, must be written in the prose of a magician. Dr. Moffatt's version is useful as a paraphrase or a series of footnotes, helping here and there to make the meaning clear, and, no doubt, it is mainly for this that he intended it. But, written in such prose, the Gospels seem to me to cease to be true, because they no longer convince the imagination as we read. If Dr. Moffatt had only remembered that the best prose is traditional, and that emotional prose is rhythmical by its very nature, he would have hesitated before attempting to make Jerusalem real by making it like an English provincial town.

If I am unjust to him, blame the singers who drove me out from my study, and the sweep who made it necessary to have the books moved from my desk. And, especially, blame the singers. I should like to go up and stand outside their door and read aloud passages from one of the more denunciatory prophets in the Old Testament. Howl, Moab! Howl, Tarshish! . . . It is really very annoying.

## VII. Afternoon Tea

OF those of us who are human, most have a favourite meal of the day. Some—though these, perhaps, are hardly human—would even give the first place, in praise as well as in time, to breakfast. These are the men and women with good consciences to whom every new morning comes as a delightful collaborator in the work of the world. They do not need to dally a little longer in that second world of sleep, where forgetfulness is more beautiful than a dream—where yesterday does not pursue nor to-morrow stand threatening in the way. They regard sleep, indeed, chiefly as an interval between two periods of work, and if a man of genius could find a means of reducing the necessary amount by half they would feel no instinctive hatred of him or desire to banish him to another star. They wake in the morning at the slightest tap—indeed, they do not need even a tap—for they can set themselves like an alarum clock for any hour they please before going to bed. More than this, their bodies, their minds and their souls all seem to wake up together. With many of us the body, the soul and the mind have each a different hour for waking. The body may be roused from his lair by a cup of morning tea, but the mind and the soul do not always accompany it to the bathroom and the

breakfast-table. On the Continent this is generally recognized, and, as a result, no one dreams of sitting down before luncheon to a meal for the proper appreciation of which an active intelligence is required. Coffee and rolls are not a meal for the intelligence at all: they are merely a concession to the craving of the body while the mind is slowly climbing its way back to wakefulness. The English breakfast, on the other hand—and it is worst of all in the hotels—treats you as a complete human being from the moment at which you are able to appear in public. It offers you a choice of foods that to a poor man would seem a banquet, and it is only from the fact that no wines are on the table that a stranger to our planet would recognize that it is not a serious meal after all. Even in the hotels, I doubt if the average Englishman is happy in presence of this glut of food—porridge and fish and bacon and eggs and toast and marmalade—that is offered to him. He is, for the most part, a silent breakfaster, propping up his newspaper against the flower-vase and grunting out occasional headlines to his wife, who answers him in squeaks from the picture-paper that she is reading. Children are taught not to read at meals, but in the hotels their elders would rather read an account of the most odious crime that can be imagined than attempt rational conversation at the breakfast-table. Indeed, if human beings were rational at that hour of the day, no one would dream of offering them such a dish as porridge. If porridge were fit to eat, it would be fit to eat at dinner; yet neither you nor I have ever in our lives seen a

man sitting down to a dish of porridge in evening dress. Again, breakfast is the only meal at which anyone would dare to assume that, in a world teeming with sole and turbot, our favourite fish was Findon haddock. I have nothing against Findon haddock save this—that if you were taking a man out to luncheon or dinner, you would no more think of offering him a Findon haddock than a smoked herring. All this is at least half-way towards proof that those who invented the English breakfast were cunningly aware that the finer elements of taste—the mind and the soul, indeed—are not awake at so early an hour of the morning, and, while pretending to cater for the mind and the soul with a choice of dishes, deliberately fobbed off on us all manner of dishes that no man of judgment would think of eating after he had become a more or less rational being about midday.

Yet the fact remains that a minority of people do enjoy breakfast. They are as noisy as the birds a few hours after the sun is up, and would rather talk than read the papers. For myself, I think it is always best to read the news of the world while the intelligence is still too sleepy to read a good book or to realize what a tragic mess we human beings have made of the simple problem of providing bread and cinemas for everybody. To read a morning paper at luncheon would spoil a good meal for many a sensitive man. Seen through the sleepy eyes of half-past nine, however, the follies of our kind seem comparatively remote and pardonable errors. If the " Morning Post " came out in the afternoon, it would produce

an epidemic of apoplexy in the clubs. Brought out in the half-awake hours of the morning, it does not disturb the digestion of a single one of the heartiest eaters in England. A man who has just got out of bed, indeed, has already enough miseries of his own to keep him from feeling too sensitively the miseries of the world in general. This lack of general sensitiveness however, while it makes breakfast an admirable meal at which to read the news, makes it an almost impossible meal for good conversation. A famous statesman used to make a practice of inviting people to breakfast rather than to either of the later meals. It was probably owing to the fatuity of the advice they gave him at so unreasonable an hour that he ended by all but ruining the civilized world.

At the same time, I should not like it to be thought that I judge a meal merely by the opportunities it affords for good conversation. Good conversation is a poor substitute for good food, and with good food expeditiously served it is extraordinary how pleasantly even the thinnest tinkle of conversation steals upon the ear. Conversation of some kind there must be. There is something hoggish in sitting down to good food alone. One might as well be an animal, eating merely in order to keep alive. To eat in company helps to conceal the baseness of our appetites from us, and enables us to eat without shame an excess of dishes that would stab our consciences if no ladies were present. Alone, man falls back on a chop and bread and cheese, and drinks bitter beer. It is only in company that his appetite becomes magniloquent, and expresses

itself in a multitude of dishes and a procession of strong drinks. Hence, if a man says that his favourite meal is dinner, you may be sure that he is not in the habit of dining alone. I am not sure that I myself have a favourite meal, but, if I have, I am sure it is not dinner. I like dinner better than luncheon, and luncheon better than breakfast; but, even so, that does not mean that I like it well enough to give it so friendly a name as "favourite." I doubt if I could truthfully say that I enjoy any meal for its own sake. I enjoy some dinners and dislike others. Luncheon to-day may make me as happy as a king, and to-morrow may be but a dutiful working of the jaws. If waiters could only run backwards and forwards as fast as I can eat, I should never spend more than ten minutes at any meal. At the same time, there is one meal of the day, if it can be called a meal, to which I am in theory particularly attached. I find myself longing for afternoon tea as I never find myself longing for luncheon or dinner. In practice I often forget all about it, but, if once I remember, I begin to long for it as one longs at times for tobacco. It is a meal that gives one none of the bothers of eating and all the finer delights of drinking. It stimulates without intoxicating. It warms but does not inflame. China tea in a china cup—what other spell so potent is there against that peculiar flagging of the spirit that comes in the afternoon? Not that I agree with those women who resort to the teapot at all hours of the day for a charm against weariness. This is but tippling in drugs and an abuse of drinking. Tea should not be drunk above twice a

day—perhaps, not above once. It breaks the dullest afternoon into two parts and should be reserved for this noble use. It comes to us, moreover, not merely as something delightful to the taste, but a delightful idea in the mind. The idea of tea is more beautiful than any tea that was ever poured into a cup. Its effect upon us is that of a magical word or some other enchantment of the imagination rather than of mere prey for our stomachs. It is the only meal of the day that we could not conceive one of the lower animals sharing with us. An ostrich might breakfast with us, and a wolf lunch, and a pig dine, but no animal is fit to come with us to the tea-table but a cat, and a cat is only technically an animal, being divine.

I doubt, however, if tea should be shared even with the animal called man or with the still more charming animal called woman. It is, perhaps, still just a little too early for conversation, which, indeed, reaches its best some time after sunset. Women, apparently, find it easy to talk at afternoon tea, but even they are wittier after nightfall. Coffee for conversation, tea for meditation, is a good rule. The great age of English wit was an age of coffee-drinking. The introduction of afternoon tea made for a decrease of wit but improved poetry, morals, and everything that comes of quiet thought. Peace follows tea all the world over. At least, it follows China tea. China itself, as a result of drinking the pot of peace for centuries, was the quietest nation on earth till the introduction of the republican ideals of coffee-drinking Latins. And in Europe the most obstreperous nations are those most addicted to coffee. Coffee

produced the Fascisti of Italy, and excited the French to the madness of the Ruhr. We rightly speak of a storm in a teacup as the tiniest disturbance in the world, but out of a coffee-cup come hurricanes. Much that I have said does not, of course, apply to Indian tea, which is scarcely tea at all but a half-sister to coffee. There is no soothing in that fiery stimulant, and, in search of peace, you might almost as well drink raw whisky. Those who drink it have a curious superstition that it is better than China tea. They are persons of gross nature, who like a drink "with a kick in it." For them China tea has no flavour and is but water faintly tinged. It is as though one were to prefer Mrs. Henry Wood to Jane Austen. And, indeed, there are thousands of people who believe that even literature should be something "with a kick in it." It is no use arguing with them. They are indifferent to the finer fragrances and mistake delicacy for insipidity. The drinker of Indian tea, I think, is more likely than the drinker of China tea to drink to excess. China tea is the only good drink in the world which it is fairly easy to take in moderation. Now moderation is of all things the most fair. If I were a pagan, I should build a temple to it as to a goddess. The path of excess, according to Blake, leads to the palace of wisdom, and many people who themselves are moderate in their lives are fond of quoting this immoderate philosophy as though it were true. I do not know why it is that such a number of people try to make up for the virtue of their conduct by the viciousness of their beliefs. The only wisdom to

which excess leads, so far as I have ever seen, is the wisdom of repentance, and even that seldom lasts longer than a headache. Hence I would praise China tea, not, perhaps, as a substitute for stronger drinks, but because it is well that a man should pay honour to the principle of moderation at, at least, one meal a day. Would that tobacco were as innocent a drug, that one could leave untasted save for one brief spell in the afternoon ! But tobacco, when one is not smoking it, fills the thoughts, and, in order not to think about it, one goes on smoking it. That is why I have so often resolved to give up tobacco altogether. I do not think anyone has ever needed to resolve to give up China tea. It is one of the few things in regard to which a good resolution would be absurd. It does not, as they say, " get a grip " on you ; its hold is so light that it is little more than a caress. Its chains are as fragile as the daisy-chains of children. Some day I shall write an essay in praise of it.

## VIII. Out of Print

THERE is a pleasure in seeing a book, if it is one of one's own books, going out of print. It encourages a faint hope that, even if one allows for the numerous people who may have bought it by mistake, a man or a woman here and there may have actually liked it. It was, therefore, with some emotion that I learned that an early work of mine—of which you, charming reader, have never heard the name—had been out of print for ten years and that not a copy of it was procurable. I had not thought much about it during those ten years, but, if I did happen to remember it, it was always with pity for the publisher and, a little also, for all those piles of unsold copies of the book that must be lying under ever-deepening dust on his floors and on his shelves. The book, I may as well confess at once, made no stir in the world. Not the tiniest pebble falling lightly into the deepest parts of the sea could cause less commotion. I alone, among all the inhabitants of the earth, was considerably excited about it. But then it was my first book, and to publish one's writings for the first time between stiff cloth covers, even though no one takes any notice, is always an exciting experience. If one knew that no one was going to take any notice, would one publish all the same? I think one would. There is satisfac-

tion in being in a book. One cannot read it, perhaps, any more than the great public can ; but one can take it up and look at the olive-green cover and the gilt letters and reflect that, unless somebody throws it into the dustbin or some accident or fire or flood befalls it, it will last a little longer than the morning's paper. It certainly did not alter my view of the human race to find that, while some of them read Shakespeare and more of them read "Tit-Bits," none of them would waste either their time or five shillings on reading me. To have the book out was enough. It was at first perhaps a little startling to find that sentences that had cost me so much pain, and pages that were filled with my enjoyments, like a cup filled to the brim, should be met with as stony an indifference as though the human race were a dead wall ; but, after I had recovered from a slight loss of balance under the shock, I contentedly put the book on a shelf and left it there till either a friend borrowed it and, with pardonable carelessness, left in a 'bus a book that he asked for only out of politeness—or it may have disappeared during a flitting. Whatever its fate may have been, I did not see the book again for some years, when I came on a copy—still uncut—in a second-hand bookseller's. Piously, paternally, I took it up, and asked the book-seller the price. "Oh, you can have *that* for sixpence!" he said. Had he asked a shilling I should not have been flattered, but I should have been grateful. Had he but asked two shillings, I should have felt myself a successful author. I was comforted, however, on meeting a poet a few days later who told

me with a long face that he had been sold a copy of his first book by the same book-seller for a penny. How cheaply first editions can be picked up sometimes! It has always been the fourth, fifth and sixth editions of my books that have been unobtainable. Except, as I discovered during the week, as regards my first book, of which the first edition appears to be as difficult to procure as the sixth.

I trust that no one, reading these lines, will have been led to think that, in relating the fact that my first book has gone out of print, I wish to boast. I am glad that it has gone out of print, but it is only fair to say that it did not go out of print because anybody bought it. It went quietly out of print without wasting the shillings of a single additional purchaser. It simply disappeared. Requiring a copy of the book for a certain reference, I wrote to the publisher recently, asking him to send me one. He replied by return post that he did not possess one—had not possessed one for eight or ten years—and that the book had gone out of print in the most unusual fashion. His binders, he said, had suddenly gone bankrupt, and, in the confusion that followed, his stock of this particular book had mysteriously disappeared, no one knew whither. And, he might truthfully have added, no one cared. He had not even troubled to write to me about it, nor had I in the interval troubled to write to him. Publisher and author, we neglected the little nursling as callously as did the world in general, which, after all, had its own business to mind. Had I but known, I should have preserved it in a locked drawer, safe from men and puppies.

For, if you wish to keep books, you must guard them against young dogs as well as against borrowers and furniture removers. It was a collie six months old that ate my first copy of "Pride and Prejudice." As for borrowers, I should not mind them if I believed they borrowed for any purpose and not for the mere love of borrowing. As often as not they merely want "something to read," as though books were like drink and a shelf could be as easily refilled as a whisky-decanter. Not but what in some respects I prefer borrowers to lenders. There is no tribe of human beings more pestiferous than the people who insist on lending you books, whether you wish to borrow them or not. They thrust them upon you as you are leaving, with an enthusiasm that would make it seem a rudeness to refuse. I confess I have no taste for other people's books, and I do not like carrying them about in 'buses and tubes and taxis, and I like still less carrying them when I am walking. I do not, as a rule, even wish to read them. I have no time to read my own books—the books, I mean, that I possess, not those that I have written, all of which I have read carefully in proof—why, then, should I wish to read other people's? Yet, if I borrow a book, I cannot abstain from reading it without a pricking of conscience every time I see it and I cannot help seeing it every time I am looking for something else. Among my own books, on the other hand, I can sit quietly in the room without any sense of guilt even if I never open them. If the book is by one of my friends, I should feel ashamed if I had not gone so far as to cut the pages.

But there my duty ends, and, if I go further, it is for pleasure. As for the world's masterpieces, how patiently, how stilly they keep their places on the shelves till that predestined evening when a hand is stretched out and the book falls back into it without a reproach for a past filled with neglect, without a comment on all the years that we have both wasted—and the blame for the separation entirely on my side!

This, however, is travelling far from my proper theme, which is—or was—the pleasure an author feels in seeing his book going out of print. This pleasure is due in most cases, I fancy, to the knowledge that the book, in going out of print, has gone into the homes of human beings. But, even without this belief, it is worth while going out of print. I have a friend who wrote a book of verse—a charming book—the stock of which lay for years with small sign of diminution on the publisher's shelves. One night a fire broke out at the publisher's and consumed everything on the premises, including the poetry. Till that moment my friend's book had been a failure: now, however, it became a brilliant success. Every copy of the book was paid for in full by the insurance company, and my friend was as much in pocket as if he had sold an edition to the book-sellers. Poets, however, cannot expect always to be so fortunate as this. Accidents of the desired kind simply will not happen to their verse. As a result, it is only a very exceptional poet who has ever the pleasure of seeing his books going out of print. This is especially regrettable, because poets frequently

have to pay in order to get their work out in book form. So great is the passion for appearing in cloth covers that even a man without gifts, without a public and without means will spend a year's savings on the vanity of bringing out a book. Every one who does so, we may take it, has some trembling hope that it will somewhere, somewhen, somehow be read by somebody as excitedly as it was written by him. Why, except for pay, we should be interested in exciting anybody but our immediate friends is a question that may puzzle the unambitious; but the average author knows that it would please him immensely to be told that someone had been seen reading one of his books in a lonely hut in Kamchatka, or that a native chief on the shores of Lake Victoria Nyanza had put it into his library. It is pleasant for an author even to hear that someone has been seen reading his book on a 'bus or in a restaurant. No doubt there are a few authors who have grown accustomed to being read by other people. But most of us have had little opportunity of becoming jaded in this respect. I, at least, have never caught a single human being reading a book of mine, and have only once heard of anybody's being seen reading one in a restaurant. He, I have no doubt, was a reviewer, reading the book reluctantly and for gain. Even so, I still enjoy bringing books out. I do not read them, you do not read them, and there is never a fire at my publisher's, so that there is not much money to be made. Still, there they are, something accomplished, something done, like a toy that a child has made and left in a cupboard. Little by

little, time will eat them up, chewing their unthumbed pages into less than dust with the slow and deliberate patience of a Fletcher. Or, if another war comes, they may be pulped and cleansed of their print and remanufactured into new paper. Who can tell how books disappear? I have seldom seen a book torn up or destroyed, and yet the mortality among books must be heavy. Even of the great writers —Shakespeare and Milton and Bunyan—the first editions are rare. Is there some burying-beetle that accounts for the disappearance of worn-out books as for dead mice and birds? If so, there is one more justification for publishing books. In publishing a book one is ultimately providing one of God's creatures with food. Hence, perhaps, I ought to regret the disappearance of that first edition of mine —into the maw of what pulper I know not. But I feel no such regret. It has given me more pleasure to have a book out of print than any beetle could have got merely from eating it. My one regret is that I did not myself keep a copy of so rare a volume—a volume so rare that you will never see it mentioned in the second-hand book-sellers' catalogues, or, indeed, anywhere else.

## IX. Going for a Walk

ALMOST all those who write about walking make it a very serious business. They obviously believe that there is some special merit in carrying your luggage on your back, in covering long distances, in arriving footsore and dust-smeared at the end of the day at a third-rate inn, and in never staying anywhere long enough to do much more than take out a road-map and consider the next day's journey. This, it seems to me, is a brutal form of pleasure that should no more be encouraged than bull-fighting. And, indeed, if one has to choose between being brutal to oneself and being brutal to a bull, the bull is the tougher animal of the two, and is likely to suffer less as a result of harsh treatment. Long walks with a pack on one's back are no doubt necessary in time of war, but I do not see why a man should go on marching in times of peace. It seems to me an extraordinary example of human contradictoriness to go any great distance on foot when it is possible to go by train or by motor-car. It would be as reasonable to swim instead of travelling by steamer. It is a reversion to savagery and a foolish pretence that the twentieth century does not exist. People who indulge in those orgies of fatigue known as walking tours say that it is delightful to arrive weary at an inn

and to sit down to cold roast chicken and a bottle of wine. It surely ought to be possible to enjoy cold roast chicken and a bottle of wine without paying so excessive a price for it. Why should it be thought that I need to stun my senses with walking in order to sit down cheerfully to dinner? I am sure that those who take the greatest pleasure in eating have seldom any love for unnecessary exercise. And, indeed, from all I know of walkers, I should say that of all men they have the least delicate palate. They will lunch on biscuits and cheese and bitter beer in a public-house and recall this a year later as a feast for gods. Not once in the course of their journey do they sit down to a good honest meal such as they would expect, and rightly expect, to be given at home. They lose the finer edge of appetite, and after the horrors of a long march take greedily to food that a good-natured woman would not give to her Pekinese. I do not know, indeed, in what respect these long and tedious walks can make a man happier, unless he has a taste for saving money. To go on foot is certainly to save a coach-fare or a railway-fare, and to stay at the worst inn is cheaper than staying at the best hotel. But I do not think that this is a consideration that weighed with such noble walkers as Hazlitt and Stevenson or weighs with Mr. Belloc. They must have been lured on by some finer pleasure. Or we may put the blame on some demon of unrest that incites a man always to expect the perfect town a little way beyond the town at which he has just arrived. There is no denying that most of us, when we arrive at a

place, immediately begin to think of other places to which we may go from it. If I arrive in Bath, I have scarcely looked at the town when I find myself longing for a day at Wells. If I go to St. Ives, instead of settling down to enjoy the place itself, I immediately begin to plan an excursion to the Land's End or the Lizard. The place at which one is not is more potently attractive than the place at which one is, and one longs for a sight of the world on the other side of the hill or on the far side of the headland as though one might suddenly step into magic. Men have gone round the earth for no other reason. The men who go on walking tours, I imagine, must also be in search of the magic on the far side of the headland and on the other side of the hill. This, and not any inhuman pleasure in aching limbs and burning feet, is their legitimate defence.

For myself, if I go for a walk, it is merely because I cannot sit still all day in one place. All human beings feel the need to circulate. Most of us, however, differ from the long-distance walkers in liking to settle down in one place to which we may always come back, as a swimmer comes back to the ladder, after our small peregrinations. Our notion of a walk is anything from three to five miles. If at the end of the outward journey we can have a quarter of an hour's rest and a cup of tea, we do not care if it extends to seven miles. Being human, we are subject to temptation and are constantly pushing on an extra mile or so out of curiosity. But, on the whole, we find little difficulty in being back in good time for meals, and, if we are suddenly seized by the

desire to go a long way, we either take a train or hire a motor-car. There are men of large and rebellious spirit who would feel enslaved if they could not go for a walk without knowing that at the end of three miles they had to turn and make their way back to a meal. If this is slavery, the yoke, it seems to me, is a very light one. After all, what evidence is there that happiness is more likely to be found at twenty miles' distance from the place where one breakfasted than at three? If you wish to enjoy walking, the most important thing is to choose a hotel or lodging where the food is good, where the bed is comfortable, and where the surrounding country within a three or four miles' radius contains plenty of roads and paths, a small and easily-climbed hill, a wood, open fields, a river or stream of some kind, and a number of duck-ponds. If you care for the sea, you can dispense with most of these things, and you can quite contentedly go the same walk day after day, sauntering round the harbour, clambering over the less difficult rocks, crossing the half-mile of strand where the seagulls run out of your way, and so on to the path among the brambles and bracken that leads round the green and stony headland. I do not say that you can take this walk three times a day and wish for no other. Even here the demon of discontent will drive you inland at times up the steep lane with the trickle of water running down it and, at the end of it, the smell of farms and of cows. But there is no doubt that at the sea we are not nearly so eager for variety in our walks as we are in other places. The demon of unrest finds its image in

the sea itself and is pacified. Even in inland places, however, I am not sure that, much as I love a choice of walks, I do not on most occasions settle down to one favourite walk repeated again and again and leave most of the others to the leisure of the future. After all, the chief object of a walk is not to go anywhere in particular, but is to find a good place to sit down. When you have found this, you return to it day after day, and, instead of attempting to make your way round the world, sit down on a tree-stump or on the grass and allow the world to make its way round you. This, I think, is the only way in which to see the world. If you make yourself a part of the procession you cannot see the procession. To do this, you must be content to be a silent spectator, and in time the procession will surely begin. Infant rabbits that have as yet hardly learned the first letter of fear will come out of their holes, and, still grey as rats, with alert ears and dangling paws, will take a look round at the grassy earth. The lizard will creep up the stalk of the dead bracken in the sun. The blue-tit with its beak full of moss will descend with a leap from bough to bough and flutter without alarm to the hole at the foot of the tree where two of them, happy in their early married life, seem to be making a nest. Or a pied woodpecker may suddenly alight on the bare trunk of a tree and peck at it, like a County Council navvy at work on street repairs, till, suspecting that there is a stranger in the wood, he looks about him fearfully and begins to edge round to the far side of the tree like a scurrying spider. Or you may pick up a fir-cone and

find a yellow ladybird (with, if I remember right, brown spots) hidden in its shelves. And, above your head, one song will follow another, and hedge-sparrow, wren, willow-wren, cuckoo, blackcap, robin, and the circus of all the tits, will one after another appear, or at least become audible and so appear to the imagination, and melt into nothingness again. Not, indeed, that you can be sure that anything new will happen. But the best way to make sure of its happening is to sit still and wait for it. Nature reveals itself little by little, and, if you wished to write a life-history even of a woodmouse, you would have to spend years of your own life waiting and watching, bending over its cradle, turning a kindly eye on its wooing, a guest at its wedding, a friend in the bosom of its family, and, finally, a mourner at its grave. Who can measure the hopes and fears of a snail? Who knows even so familiar a bird as the robin in its closest secrets or could write the "Othellos" and "King Lears" of its brief existence? It is easier to write the life of Mr. Gladstone than the life of a mole. If Mr. Gladstone had only become visible once in a blue moon to a patient watcher, and even then had torn his way back into darkness in frenzied haste, Lord Morley could hardly have written three volumes about him. Hence most of us are a great deal more mystified by the doings of beasts and birds than by the doings of men. I dropped into a country inn the other evening, where a couple of men, workers at the watercress beds, were talking about the cuckoo that had been heard for the first time that morning. The landlord said that it was

a wonderful thing how cuckoos come to England all the way from Africa and nobody sees them coming. "What makes you think the cuckoo comes from Africa?" asked one of the men, who had a military ribbon sewed on his shabby waistcoat. "Isn't it known?" said the landlord; "doesn't everybody say so?" The man pulled at a clay pipe. "I been to Africa," he declared, "and I never saw a cuckoo. I know lots of men been to Africa, and I've asked them this question, and not one of them could ever tell me he saw a cuckoo." His friend nodded. "I been to Africa, too," he said. "And did you ever see a cuckoo?" the other asked him. "No, I never saw no cuckoo," was the answer. "But where," demanded the orthodox landlord, "does the cuckoo go when it leaves England?" "Ah!" said the man, taking the pipe out of his mouth, "but *does* it go? Or does it change its plumage and turn into a 'awk? Did you ever notice that there are more 'awks in winter than in summer?" I asked him if he also believed that swallows stayed in England and hibernated at the bottom of ponds. "No," he said, "swallows have been seen from the lighthouses coming across. Mind, I don't say I *believe* a cuckoo turns into a 'awk. But I want to meet a man who can honestly tell me he has ever seen a cuckoo in Africa. It's a wonderful thing," he added, "to think that thousands of birds can find their way all those miles over the sea from Russia and Africa and God knows where, and each of them drop down in its own place. It's as if each of them knew exactly. How do they know? Wild duck, wild geese—

they all do it." To hear birds talked of in this way in a public-house—and I have often heard talk of the sort in ill-lit bars, both in fishing-villages and in country places—confirmed me in the opinion that an interest in birds, instead of being a modern heresy, as is sometimes maintained, is one of the common and secular interests of mankind. Let your morning walk include the dell of thorn and bramble where the two nightingales, their white breasts visible through the leaves, are practising their songs, and let your evening walk include a visit to the little public-house —it is only a hundred yards away—and you will agree with me. The landlord's face is bright with a really enthusiastic smile as he nods and says: "I reckon the cock chaäfinch is a purty bird." And the man with the clay pipe nods and agrees, "None purtier."

## X. Looking Through a Microscope

EVERY child in every civilized country ought at the age of six to be presented by the State with a well-filled revolving book-case, at the age of seven with a piano-player and fifty rolls of Beethoven, Bach, Mozart, Schubert, Schumann, and Scarlatti, and at the age of eight with a microscope. It is only a few weeks since I looked through a microscope for the first time. If I had possessed one of my own as a child, I should almost certainly have been tempted to peep into a new continent, but the microscopes of other people always seemed to me the cold machines of school-masters and to belong to a world in which all the words meant very little and ended in *-aceæ*. Now that a microscope has come into the house, however, all that is changed, and I find myself gazing through the glass at the palate of a *Lymnæus palustris* with as much eagerness as though I were breaking through into wonders as great as Tutankhamen's. I do not know whether a *Lymnæus palustris* is a bird, a beast, or a fish: I have looked it up in vain in the index to the "Encyclopædia"; but I obtain great satisfaction from looking at its palate. It is like a little transparent foot in a little transparent brown stocking. There is also a dark patch upon which it is pleasant to speculate whether it is the important part of the palate or merely a flaw in the slide. It

may seem odd that I should have begun my microscopy on so difficult a subject as the palate of a *Lymnæus palustris*, but our lives are ruled by accident. It was a lady who bought the slides, and, as she was ignorant on such matters, she asked a man of some scientific knowledge to go with her into the instrument seller's and help her to make a choice. It was apparently a shop that does most of its business with medical students, and nearly all the slides in stock were of a kind that the shop assistant could not explain in mixed company without embarrassment. "What is this one?" the man of science asked him, taking up a slide. The shop assistant looked uncomfortable and, with one side of his mouth so that the lady might not hear, whispered "Medical specimen, sir." The man of science, unfortunately, was slightly deaf, and said, "I didn't catch that." The shop assistant looked away from the lady, swallowed his uvula and whispered hoarsely a word that he had never hitherto spoken in the presence of women. When this had happened once or twice, the lady, taking pity on the shop assistant, seized the first half-dozen slides that could not by any stretch of the imagination be described as "medical specimens," and purchased them. These, as it happened, were the palate already mentioned of a *Lymnæus palustris*, the hair of a Nepal bat, the hair of a Java bat, the hair of a mole, something called *Halichondria panicea* (though a question-mark on the label shows that there is a doubt about this), the leaf of a plant called *Onosmataurica* from Asia Minor, and another slide labelled "Scalasiform tissue."

# Looking Through a Microscope

My knowledge of the sciences is thus of a rather peculiar and diversified kind. I do not know whether I am mainly a botanist or a zoologist, or more of an entomologist than either. I fancy I must know most about zoology, if the hairs of bats and moles count for anything. About the hair of the Nepal bat I know practically all there is to be known. It shines in a good light like a thin rope of silver wire. I have studied it again and again, and am confident that if I stared at it till Judgment Day there is not another fact to be discovered about it. If I were asked to distinguish between it and the hair of a Java bat, I should say that the hair of the Java bat is a little longer, but otherwise there is nothing to choose between them. For a time I had a wild dream that I might become such an authority on the subject that, on being confronted with a hair of each, I should be able to say "Java" or "Nepal" without even a moment's hesitation. The hair of a mole, on the other hand, seems on examination to present certain marked differences. The wire, in this case, is not wound spirally but is a series of ring-shaped sections. Feeling by this time an insatiable curiosity on the subject of hair, I drew out a hair of my own —it is odd what sacrifices one will make in the interests of science—and laid it on a slide. It turned out to be totally unlike either a bat's or a mole's. It had that arterial look that one notices in the bare branches of beech-trees. And, much to my relief, it was not silver. Had I had a cat or a dog in the house, I should no doubt have sacrificed them, too, on the altar of knowledge, and for a day or two it was dangerous

even for a friend to visit me unless he was bald. After a time, however, I became firmly persuaded that trichology, as the science relating to hair is known in the barbers' journals, is a barren subject yielding a minimum of discovery to a maximum of investigation, and I went out to another instrument seller's and bought a number of slides of a quite different kind.

There are the *Algæ*, for instance. If I had been asked a month ago what *Algæ* were, I should have said "Seaweed." Having examined them under the microscope, however, and observed how very unlike they were to any seaweed I had ever known, I turned for help to the "Encyclopædia." There I found, as I expected, a considerable amount of information about the subject. I read:

The place of *Algae* in the vegetable kingdom may be shown by means of a table:

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| The Vegetable Kingdom | Cryptogamia | Thallophyta | Myxomycetes |
| | | | Fungi |
| | | | Algæ |
| | | Bryophyta | |
| | | Pteridophyta | |
| | Phanerogamia | Gymnosperms | |
| | | Angiosperms | |

It may be a humiliating confession to have to make in one's middle age, but I did not understand a word of it. I proceeded through the families of the *Algæ* one by one, however—and they are very large families—and, when I came to the *Chlorophyceæ*, which are subdivided into the *Conjugatæ*, the *Euchlorophyceæ*, and the *Characeæ*, I was not surprised to learn that two Swedish algologists had proposed what is to all intents and purposes a revolution in the terminology relating to this particular family.

The *Euchlorophyceæ*, it appears, have been till recently "regarded as made up of the three series of families—*Protococcales*, *Confervales*, and *Siphonales*." All this is now to be thrown into the melting-pot and there is to be a re-grouping and a renaming of the several groups that will delight every algologist and lover of the English language. "*Akontæ* and *Œdogoniaceæ*," for instance, "with a chaplet of cilia become *Stephanokontæ*, and the *Algæ* remaining over in the three series from which the *Heterokontæ* and *Stephanokontæ* are withdrawn become *Isokontæ*." It is in the same paragraph of notable names that we are told that "*Gomontia* is a shell-boring alga, *Dermatophyton* grows on the carapace of the tortoise, and *Trichophilus* in the hairs of the sloth. Certain *Protococcales* and *Confervales* exist as the gonidia of the lichenthallus." I suspect that there must have been botanists present at the Tower of Babel, and that, for some reason, they were put under a special curse so that, till the end of the world, they have to go on making up strange words that Rabelais or Sterne would have regarded as being too wild exaggerations to invent even as a joke. I confess I can read a great deal of this kind of thing with pleasure, but the words mean as little to me as if I had never learned to spell. When I read the names of the four oogamous families of the *Confervales* —the *Cylindrocapsaceæ*, the *Sphæropleaceæ*, the *Œdogoniaceæ* and the *Coliochætaceæ*—my energy is so exhausted by the time I have learnt to pronounce them that I have none left for trying to understand them. Do botanists themselves pronounce these words in casual conversation

with each other? Do such words remain in the memory as "hen," "pig" and "mouse" do, with all sorts of pleasant and amusing associations? If I knew the *Algæ* only by their names, I should despair of ever being able to get better acquainted with them. Luckily, I have seen them in microscopic slides, and I know how perfectly charming they are and that they present no such difficulties to the eye as they present to the ear. I have a slide, for instance, with a delightful little fresh water *Alga*, called *Volvox*, floating about in scores in a drop or so of water, and looking like a sea-urchin with one or two black spots on it. When I tilt the slide, the little creature rolls round and round in the water and, even so, floats with as much grace as a balloon rising through the air.

If ever I keep a pet in a miscroscope slide it shall be an *Alga*. I feel as tenderly already towards all those *Algæ* floating about in the water as a shepherd of the old days towards his flock of sheep. Would that every drop of water contained such a population of charmers! Until I looked through a microscope I firmly believed that every drop of water did. I was convinced that lions as tiny as a speck of dust, and whales smaller than that, and elephants smaller still, and all the other animals of Noah's Ark in like proportions, were swimming about in the glass of water that my neighbour drank at luncheon. Alas, I put the matter to the test, and looked at a drop of tap-water through the microscope, and saw no living creature whatever—no, not so much as a typhoid bacillus.

Do not think, however, that I have been disappointed by my investigations into the mysteries of nature. I have seen the pollen of a tulip through the eye of a bee, and the stinging hairs of a nettle through the eye of a ladybird. In a strong light, every stinging hair on the nettle is a long and terrible glass spear, such as might be carried on the shoulders of monstrous insects, if they ever went to war. Or you might think, when you look at them, that they were stalactites in a cave. Never before did I realize what a marvel it is that a human being can be stung by a nettle and survive. Luckily, all this new world of littleness does not bristle with horrors after the same fashion. Everywhere one finds the pattern of honeycombs or of chain-armour. There is a linked sweetness in the stem of every flower. How delightful it is to look at the stem of traveller's joy with its green network of cells, all of them of different sizes, and its wavy pink margin like the sands round the crooked shore of an island! Here it is easy to imagine, if one only had a large enough microscope, one would see a traffic of boats busy about the shores, and the chalets of microbes crowded on the edge of every cell as on the borders of the lake. A child said to me the other day: "When I grow up, I shall have a microscope so big that I shall have to climb up a ladder to look through it." I, too, am conscious of the gnawings of just such a greed. These sections of a Scotch fir stem at the ages of one and two and three do but hint, like a poor map, at rivers flowing through the tree, and I would visit those rivers in person through a larger lens than any yet known to man. Then

there is the flower-bud of the buttercup, all chains and reticulations, and of patterns and colours almost fairer than the buttercup in the field. Happy, surely, is the insect that can see such a world with the natural eye. Happy is the man who can become for a moment even the tenth part of an insect in his vision, and be led to guess at the teeming life that must exist in every atom and that will still be a secret awaiting his discovery a thousand years after he has scaled the top of Everest.

## XI. Wonders

MEN cannot meet—at least, not in a bar—without dipping into their memories in search of wonders. On entering an inn lately in a part of the country that has long been popular with artists, I found the landlord and some of the oldest inhabitants recalling with sparkling eyes the nonpareil days that are no more. The talk lingered especially round the name of a dead painter who had once lived there and whose work I had known since I was a boy. "*He* was a marvel," the landlord said tenderly; "he never *sold* his work. I mean to say, he never worked for money. Never painted a pot-boiler in his life." "In those days," chimed in an egg-merchant, "artists could both drink and paint: now they can do neither. Gee, to watch Arthur Roe drinking was an education. Double cognacs every time. He would never drink anything else, and his allowance was two bottles a day. I remember saying to him, 'Why don't you try whisky for a change, Roe?' and he said to me: 'I daren't. I'm too fond of it. I don't like the taste of brandy. That's why I drink it, because I can drink it in moderation.' Gee, Roe was a caution. And he meant it—absolutely. Two bottles a day. Gee, there was some life in the place in those days. They used to be waiting outside the pubs in queues, didn't they,

William ? If you didn't get here before eleven in the morning, you couldn't get in for the crowd at the bar." "I have seen Arthur Roe," the landlord took up the tale, "slipping over here from his studio at six in the morning before he had had his breakfast. Just for something to steady him. His hand would be shaking that much, he couldn't lift the glass to his mouth without spilling it. I remember seeing him tying a handkerchief round his wrist like this," and the landlord made a sling with his handkerchief for his right hand. "Then he would take the ends of the handkerchief in his left hand and make a sort of a lever—do you understand ?—to raise the hand holding the glass to his lips. After two double cognacs, he would feel a bit steadier, and hurry back to his studio, and paint, paint, paint "—and the landlord waved an imaginary brush across an imaginary canvas—"and it might be ten or eleven o'clock before you would see him again. About ten or eleven o'clock he would come across with one of his pupils for a drink. He had a lot of pupils, and he always brought them out one at a time. A regular procession it used to be—one pupil drinking with Roe, and the rest left behind to go on working. You couldn't help laughing sometimes. Reminded you of the animals going into the Ark. Poor chap, it broke him up in the end. But he never seemed to paint the worse for it. Ah, Roe was an artist ! Never sold his work. He would rather not sell a picture than paint one he didn't like." "Arthur Roe was a marvel," repeated the egg-merchant ; "where's his match to-day ? All the artists to-day are ladies or

teetotallers." And he drowned his face with a sigh in a pint of beer.

"Ah, there's still artists," said a man in a broken-down wide-awake and three days' stubble of beard, who looked like a herd. "I hear that young fellow Noakes that lodges with Mrs. Powson sent up a picture to London last week that's worth fifty pounds." "Fifty shillings, you mean," said the landlord's wife, speaking for the first time, as she held her husband's arm and leaned against him. "Fifty pounds, I mean," retorted the unshaven one indignantly. "You mean," sneered the landlord's wife, "that he *said* it was worth fifty pounds. Nobody's going to pay fifty pounds for a picture." "Now, look here, Mrs. Rennett," said the herd, doing his best to keep patient with her, "what would you say is a fair price for a picture?" She did not hesitate a moment. "I never saw a picture," she said heartily, "that I would give five shillings for." "I want a serious answer to a serious question," he told her; "how do you think an artist could pay for his rent and his frames and his paints and his models, if he sold his pictures for five shillings?" She looked round at an oil painting on the wall representing a volcano in eruption and nodded towards it. "How much did that cost, William?" she asked her husband. "Five shillings," said the landlord, chuckling. "There, now," said his wife, tossing her head in triumph. The herd waved his hand in a gesture of annoyance. "Put it this way, Mrs. Rennett," he said in a voice that sounded like a groan torn from the depths of his being. "Suppose you wanted a photograph made of

yourself—in paint—a photograph taking you all in from top to toe—dressed in your finest—a silk dress, necklace, jewels, buckles on your shoes—all as like life as you would find it in the looking-glass, down to your finger-rings—how much do you think a painter would charge you for it?" She did not answer immediately. She smiled as though she were seeing with her mind's eye a picture of herself positively ablaze with necklaces, jewels, and shoe-buckles, and were considerably pleased with it. She was evidently tempted to raise the wages of so wonder-working a painter, but she checked herself on the edge of raising them out of reason. "Five pounds," she said, coming back to hard earth out of her dream. The herd thumped the bar with his hand. "Five hundred, you mean," he said. "Five pounds," she repeated more firmly. "I say, five hundred," he almost shouted. "Oh, if it was the King or Queen!" she said airily, while the landlord winked at me as much as to say that the herd was a little bit touched in the head. "If it was Mrs. Rennett," insisted the herd. "Ask any artist you like how much he would take to paint your photograph, and he'll say five hundred pounds if he says a penny. Isn't that so, sir?" he said, turning to me. I told him that I understood that some artists would charge even a thousand pounds or more. "That's sense," declared the herd; "that's sense, Mrs. Rennett." "Catch me having my photograph painted," said Mrs Rennett with a laugh, and set to wiping the beer-marks off the bar.

As I listened to the herd talking, his imagination full of necklaces and shoe-buckles, I could

not help recalling a similar figure who had once drifted into an inn in a remote country-place in the north of Ireland at which circumstances compelled me to pass the night. Two ladies, one dark, one fair, and both young, had been marooned like myself in the same village and in the same hotel or, rather, public-house. While we were having a meal, the landlady warned us that we should likely have a visit from a curious character before the night was out. "A quare card," she called him. He was a ne'er-do-well who had inherited a small farm and was letting it go to ruin. He used to come into the village in the evening to drink, and the only work the four policemen who were stationed there ever did was seeing him home after the bar was closed. "Oh, he's a quare card!" she repeated, laughing, and she told us that no strange girl ever came into the village without his hearing of it. Sure enough, he came in the course of an hour, the picture of a music-hall tramp. His face was fringed with stubble; his clothes, like his farm, were a ruined inheritance; he bared his teeth in grins under his unshaven lip; he had small, cunning, laughing eyes. He apologized for not wearing a collar; he said he had only heard of the young ladies after he left home. "Ah," said the landlady, chaffing him, "what would a man wear a collar for unless he's in love?" "That's true," said the queer card, with a knowing grimace at one of the ladies; "you can always tell if a man's in love with a girl, because, if she comes into the house where he's sitting, he'll slip out of the room and oil his hair and put on a collar." "Ah, get out, Jimmy," said the landlady,

" what do you know about love? Jimmy thinks he knows a lot about women," she explained to us in order to incite him, " but he's as innocent as a child." Jimmy leaned back in his chair grinning self-satisfaction up to the ceiling. " Did ever I tell you, ma'am," he asked, " how I once won a gallon of porter in a bet by answering a question that no other body could answer? " " What was that? " she said. " I met a man in Scotland one day," he told us, " who said to me: ' Tell me this, now, and if you answer right I'll give you a gallon of porter. What are the seven points of beauty in a woman? ' Now which of you could answer that? " We confessed our utter ignorance. " Well, here's what I told him," he said, fixing the dark-haired lady with his gimlet eyes, as he slowly doled out the seven points to us: " wisdom and a fair countenance and good looks, black eyes, a black head of hair, well set-up and well stepped-out." The landlady clapped her hands, laughing. " And was that right? " she asked. " It was," he said with a nod, " and when he paid for the gallon of porter, he said he didn't think there was another man in the world could have answered the question." " But why black hair? " I asked him; " don't you think a fair-haired woman may be beautiful? " He looked from the dark-haired lady to the fair-haired one, and again bared his teeth in a grin. " Black hair," he said with his eyes on the dark one, " is more standing, but," swivelling his eyes on to the fair one, " fair hair is more entizing. And I'll tell you," he went on, warming to his reminiscences, " about another time I won a gallon of porter for

answering a riddle!" We nodded to him to go on. "One day," he said, "a man came up to me and betted me a gallon of porter I couldn't tell him how to tell where a girl you didn't know lived without asking her. This is what I told him. I told him that I would walk after her till it came to a lonely part of the road, and then I would go close up to her and pretend to be a little bit intoxi*cay*ted. Then I would look up into her face"—he was a small man—"and say, 'I wisht I was in gaol for stealing you.' And then, if she liked the looks of me, we'd get talking, d'ye see, and she'd let me walk home the rest of the way with her." "And that was the right answer, too?" "I won my bet," said Jimmy proudly. "Ah, Jimmy, if only you had money, all the girls would be running after you, not you after them." "If I had money," said Jimmy, his face glowing as far as dirt *can* glow at the happy thought, "do you know what I would do? I would buy a big black horse and I would get ribbons in the colours of all the nations and I would tie them in his mane and in his tail. And I would put on a new black coat and oil my hair and get on his back and ride through the village. That would be the thing to bring the girls to the doors and the windows. Every woman, old and young, would come out to see me." "Ah, one of them will catch you yet, Jimmy," said the landlady.

There was a rapturous look on his animal face as he let his imagination dwell on the picture of himself on the black horse with the ribbons in its tail. It was the same look that I saw on the face of Mrs. Rennett when she thought of that

portrait of herself in silks and buckles. For, of all the wonders of the world on which the mind fondly lingers, there is none to surpass the wonder of a man's or a woman's own self as he or she might be if only the money would run to it.

## XII. The Morals of Bird's-Nesting

SOMEONE once described someone as "a nice man—awfully inquisitive." I do not know what place inquisitiveness holds among the virtues, but one depends a great deal on it for one's amusement. The days on which one has been most inquisitive are among the days on which one has been happiest. The inquisitive man perpetually enjoys the pleasures of the chase. He may be curious about new plays or about old plays, about the lives of great men or the lives of little men, about the nature of our diseases or the nature of our souls, about stars or starfishes, about beetles or butterflies, about the style of Tacitus or the sins of Nero. It does not much matter what the object of his curiosity is: so long as he is able to keep a keen and disinterested eye on it, he will, as a rule, have found something to make him a reasonably cheerful man. The moralist, no doubt, will make a distinction between the curiosity of a Pepys and that of a Plato—between a curiosity that concerns itself with insects, like Fabre's, and a curiosity that concerns itself with men, like Plutarch's. Each of these writers, however, was enviable beyond common men in so far as he was curious. Their genius was a kind of eternal inquisitiveness of which most of us, apparently, are not capable. I confess that I, for one, am inquisitive by fits and starts.

I easily become inquisitive in the company of inquisitive people, and share their inquisitiveness till the talk gets above my head, as it very soon does in philosophy or politics. Science and scholarship are both beyond me, save for half-an-hour at a time, and I do not think that, dearly as I love them, I shall ever know very much about race-horses. But, when I remember the happy evenings I have spent in the company of sportsmen and clergymen, discussing horses with the one and theology with the other, and excited with curiosity about the byways of their strange knowledge, I realize how much past happiness I owe to inquisitiveness, however intermittent. Why, I have listened with pleasure to a man explaining the difference between pot-still and patent-still whisky: it is true that I never can remember the difference, but his noble curiosity in such matters infected me for the time being, and made whisky seem a theme fit for discussion in the groves of Paradise. I have no doubt that, in the company of an enthusiast, I could develop an insatiable desire even to know all about wireless, though the only broadcasting I have ever heard would have been an insult to the ears of demons. Worst of all, I find myself sitting, as happy as a frog, drinking in the most outrageous scandal about people whom I know only by name and whom I trust in Heaven I shall never have to look in the eye. There is in scandal, I am afraid, just a touch of malice that spoils its disinterestedness. If only scandalmongers could be inquisitive without being malicious, what a delightful world it would be! But, as things are, it seems to me that the mis-

conduct of grasshoppers is a much more proper subject for disinterested curiosity than the misconduct of human beings.

How easy it is to become inquisitive even about little things I realized once more during Whitsuntide, when I came on a partridge's nest in the grass of the paddock at the cottage at which I was staying. Hitherto, my interest in the nests and eggs of birds has seldom been more than a fire of straw. I have liked watching birds and listening to them, but, as for tracking them down to the privacy of their homes, I have left that to men and women who can climb trees. I spent some of the happiest hours of my boyhood reading Horace for an examination in the branches of a chestnut-tree in which a thrush had built, and, when Horace grew too dull, I consoled myself by climbing higher into the tree for a peep at the blue eggs in the nest; but I have never been a collector. Other boys had glass cases full of rows of eggs of all sizes and colours, looking scarcely less charming than jewels and a great deal more charming than stars, and I used to like to hear their names one by one—wren and yellowhammer and corncrake—but, though I envied, I did not emulate. My one attempt to make a collection, indeed, took place in later life, and failed in rather humiliating circumstances almost before it was begun. Coming on the nest of a hedgesparrow among the thorns, and fascinated to the point of becoming a thief by the skyey sweets that lay there, I borrowed one of the eggs and took it home with me as a present for a lady who was very ill. I pricked it with a pin at each end and blew it dry with

a cherubic puffing of cheeks, and certainly, as it lay on the table beside her bed, it looked prettier than any diamond that was ever stolen from an Indian temple. It was much admired, and I felt the pleasant glow of one who has achieved a success. The next day, my spirits high, I set off up a steep hill, though there was a heat-wave at the time, and descended into a dell on the far side, where to my joy I found the mossy nest of a robin in the arm of an old ivy-covered oak. There were four eggs in it. Believing that the robin would not notice the loss, I took one. Had the egg been a ton in weight, I could hardly have been more exhausted when I arrived back at the house with my treasure. I had not even the energy to blow it, so flagrant was the heat of the sun, before taking it up to the sick-room. This turned out in the end to be extremely fortunate. The egg had not been in the house five minutes before the hospital nurse told the children's nurse, the children's nurse told the housemaid, and the housemaid told the cook, and they were all running distractedly hither and thither, telling each other with long mournful faces, "He's robbed a robin's nest!" If looks could have killed, I should have been carried straight to the mortuary. Every time the hospital nurse glanced at me I felt like the man who shot the albatross. Then, when the invalid lady in bed, affected by the general atmosphere of superstition, lifted up her voice and wept, and declared that now she knew she was going to die, I, too, could have bellowed in my chair, partly out of sympathy and partly out of sheer misery. Gentle reader, have you ever brought

ruin on a home? If you have, you will be able to plumb my sufferings. Luckily, I am a practical man, and, remembering that the egg was still unblown, instead of vainly beating my head and crying, "O God, O God, what shall I do?" I rose from my chair and swore that I would once more climb the hill and descend into the dell and restore the egg to the nest from which I had taken it. But the lady in bed only wept the louder, and said that that was no use, for the egg was cold by this time, and the poor little robin inside it was dead, and that it was I who had killed it, and that I had brought bad luck into the house. I assured her that, on the contrary, the egg was still lukewarm, and besought her not to take too gloomy a view of the situation till we saw whether the robin hatched it out with the rest; and with that, the egg cautiously held in my warm hand, I set out on my mission. You may think it particularly honest of me that I did not simply throw the egg into the ash-pit and go out for a quiet sleep in the hammock in the garden. But, as a matter of fact, I had by this time myself become as scared as anybody, and was as anxious about the hatching of the robin's egg as though all our lives depended on it. Lord, how the sun beat down upon me! How my tired ankles twisted in the ruts of the hard, chalky road! How breathlessly I panted up the hill! What a wreck I arrived at length, like Tannhäuser in the last act, at the foot of the oak-tree with its cool, shadowy ivy and the innocent little mossy nest in its arm! Even so, as I laid back the purloined egg among its fellows, there was in my heart a great hope as

well as a great doubt, and I went home the happier for what I had done. After that, I had to climb the hill day after day in the increasing heat-wave to see how things were going. Then I was absent for a few days, and great was my relief on returning to find that every egg had produced a bird, and that no cold and addled accuser lay in the bottom of the nest. The lady, when she heard the news, immediately felt better, and I ceased for the moment to be an object of loathing to cooks and nurses. Meanwhile, I had learned my lesson. I liked the birds none the less for what I had gone through, but I ceased to take any kind of predatory interest in their eggs.

Even when I came on the sixteen olive-brown eggs in the grass, out of which the partridge had just thrashed her way under my feet, I felt no desire to take any of them. I enjoyed the exhilaration of discovery, but I was inquisitive without being acquisitive. I immediately became more curious about birds' eggs than I had been for many years. I began to peer into every inch of the thick hedges of thorn and holly that ran round the paddock in the hope of finding the nests of other birds. Within ten minutes I had discovered two of last year's nests —which, for some strange reason, are always the easiest to find—and at last my scratched hands were rewarded with the spectacle of two black-spotted blue eggs in the hard muddy cup of the nest of a thrush. That served merely to whet my appetite; and more scratching of hands and straining of eyes soon afterwards discovered the freckled eggs of a blackbird in a grass-lined nest among the thorns. Others,

incited by my curiosity, joined in the search, and before long I was stooping on my knees among brambles and nettles, confident that a whitethroat's nest was not far off. There was a whitethroat scolding between the hedge and the ash-tree, and constantly pitching itself into the air as though in an effort to be a lark, and another was singing huskily and indignantly further along the hedge. That their nests eluded me made me all the more determined to get a sight of them. Again and again I returned to the same place, an eager Paul Pry among the nettles and the grass ; and, if I had not had to return to London, I should either have discovered one of those nests or be scouring the hedges for it still. In compensation for this failure, we came on the lovely nest of a chaffinch, so skilfully built in the fork of a hawthorn that it seemed a part of the bush itself. How like a piece of lichen-covered stem it looked ! It would have been easy to miss it altogether, if it had not been for the bright and watchful eye of the sitting bird. She did not fly away at the sight of a human being as the partridge had done. Alarming though the sight of an enormous human eye a few inches away must be, she remained still as a lifeless thing, feeling, perhaps, that in stillness and in the disguise of her nest was perfect security. I would have stretched out a hand and stroked her back but for the fear of frightening her. Those who know say that, even if one did, she would dare everything and remain on guard over her eggs. Strange to say, the discovery of the chaffinch's nest produced the desire to discover more chaffinches' nests, and, if one

turned from this pursuit, it was only to gaze into holes in rotten trees, and stare up at spouts, and study every beam in the barn in the search for some other nest as wonderful. This, I assure you, kept me happy through Whitsuntide, and I still burn with a curiosity about nests and eggs that makes it difficult for me not to take the next train into the country. If, for instance, I could find a meadow-pipit's nest with a cuckoo's egg in it! . . . Yes, there are still many things to live for.

As for the morals of bird's-nesting, it is quite a good subject. I should have written about it, if I had not remembered the robin and been diverted from my purpose.

## XIII. The Morals of Bird's-Nesting: Second Version

THOSE of you who were brought up Presbyterians—heavens, how we used to hear the chimes at midnight!—will remember that in the Psalm-book a "second version" of a psalm is occasionally given. If it is permissible to have two shots in so solemn a matter as the rhyming of a psalm, it can hardly be forbidden in so trivial an affair as the writing of an essay. In fact, I am not sure that there ought not to be a second version of every essay, in which the writer could say some of the things he intended to say when he sat down to write the first one. There is, it may be admitted, no security that even at the second attempt he will arrive anywhere near the point for which he originally and so confidently set out. He is as easily tempted down a side-street as a policeman in a suburb, and has none of the swift directness of the leader-writer, who hastens to his object like a fire brigade bent upon averting a public calamity. The essayist knows only too well that nothing that he can say will prevent the world from going up in flames. Hence he leaves fires, for the most part, to other people, the minority of whom try to put them out and the majority of whom heartily enjoy them. If he is drawn to a fire, it is as a spectator, though in his daydreams he sometimes pictures himself as a leader-writer helping to extinguish the flames.

# The Morals of Bird's-Nesting

One of the subjects on which I should like to write a leader is The Present Situation. There are moments at which I see the situation so clearly—whether in Russia or in Ireland, in France or in labour politics—that I could almost persuade myself that a few words from me would make it equally clear to the Russians and the Irish, the French and the workers, if only they would listen to me. I should also like to write a leader on The Next Step. It would, I fancy, be the same leader as the one on The Present Situation, for, after all, the present situation is that nearly everybody on earth is engaged in taking the next step and is standing with one foot raised and wavering vaguely in the air, hesitating as to where or even in what direction to bring it down again. On this point I feel that I could give some all but inspired advice, and could save a good many well-meaning people from tripping into one another or on to the ground. But, on second thoughts, I doubt if anybody would listen to me, and, on further reflection, I am not sure that I know very much more about the matter than other people. Hence I must confine myself to the third subject on which I should like to write a leader—which is the morals of bird's-nesting.

I may say at once that I am a sworn enemy of bird's-nesting. I saw a farmer the other day chasing two small boys out of a field in which they had been nefariously engaged in looking for birds' eggs in the hedges, and I was warmly on his side as he shook his stick at them and gesticulated them out of the gate. By a strange kink in my nature I began to half-sympathize with the boys when the farmer,

coming over to me and talking about small boys and eggs, said contemptuously: "And what good are they to them when they have got them?" Now, I hold that a bird's egg is in itself a good thing. It seems to me to be so good a thing that any right-minded boy, or indeed any boy in his right mind, would naturally wish to possess it. If there is a valid argument against his possessing it, it is not that eggs are no good, but that they are far too good to belong to anybody but a bird. All men and boys wish to possess something. The most primitive man shares the passions of a collector with the millionaire of Mayfair. The Dyak of Borneo collects the heads of his enemies, or did till the Puritans of Europe prevented him. The Red Indian collects the scalps of his enemies, or did till the Puritans of America prevented him. The Mohammedan collects wives, and will till the Puritans of Asia or Africa prevent him. Compared with any of these, the boy who collects birds' eggs seems to me, I must confess, a comparatively innocent person. He is less innocent than the boy who collects stamps, perhaps, but surely even twentieth-century opinion will admit that he is more innocent than the man who collects wives. Not that any of these collections is to be condemned off-hand. In its own time and place a good collection of dried heads must have given a great deal of pleasure to a great many simple people. Fashions change, however, and in nothing more than in collecting. The richest man in the world would not nowadays obtain any pleasure from seeing the withered heads of his enemies hanging on the wall above his

library fire-place. What was once amusing has become inexpedient, and for centuries civilized man has had to console himself with the heads and horns of dead beasts for the absence of the heads of his fellow-creatures. Students of anthropology know that the great mark of advancing culture is that where you once killed a man, you now kill a beast. Being human, you must kill something, but, being cautious, you do not wish to be prosecuted for murder, and so, except in time of war, you have to put up with stags and foxes as your victims, though heaven knows, there are human beings you would rather see dead. It comes to this, that you must respect the code of your age, and, for the time being, the code happens to insist on a positively girlish respect for human life. It seems to me hardly fair to discriminate in this way in favour of one animal against another. I do not mean to say that I should like to see head-hunting revived: I am too modern and squeamish for that. But I feel strongly that, if the human head must be done away with as a domestic ornament, the stag's head should also in all fairness be allowed to disappear except—hang those Americans !—from the sign-boards of public-houses. I suspect, indeed, that the ancient habit of collecting dead animals, or pieces of dead animals, was based on a childish fallacy. You once felt that, by eating your enemy and preserving his head as a sign, you acquired his prowess. You admired the qualities of the living, and believed the death of the living would ensure you the permanent possession of these qualities as your own. The genius of the deer, the humming-

bird, the butterfly—how one longs to capture them, to make them one's property for ever!

During the last half-century the spread of the scientific spirit has given men a new kind of pleasure. At first, it made them profoundly interested in "specimens," which were frequently, if not usually, dead. But as time went on, they grew dissatisfied with this, and became suddenly aware that a bird in the bush was worth two in the hands of the dissector or the taxidermist. They obtained more pleasure from studying the motions of life in an animal than from peering at its dead body. They saw that, to know a living creature, it was necessary to know it while it was alive, and that a bird when dead ceased for most purposes to be a bird. Hence Hudson, the modern writer who has told us most about birds, is also the modern writer who has written most contemptuously of the stuffed birds in museums. Similarly, Fabre, the modern writer who has told us most about insects, is also the modern writer who has dogged (if the expression is permissible) the footsteps of living insects as no entomologist ever dogged them before. The secret of a bird is in its flight and song, not in its corpse. The secret of the butterfly is in its magical transformations and in its too brief voyages among the flowers, not in the poor chloroformed casualty transfixed in a glass case. Just as one enjoys a beautiful phrase of music, not by pausing and isolating it from its context but by allowing it to pass and merge into the life of something greater than itself, so it is only the birds that pass and the butterflies that pass that reveal all their beauty as pieces of the life around us. Obviously, the

more men realize this, the more pleasure they will take in allowing living creatures to remain alive, and the less pleasure they will obtain from what are after all only the old clothes of creatures that were once beautiful. They will see that the pleasures of inquisitiveness are infinitely greater than the pleasures of acquisitiveness, and will confine their acquisitive propensities to old china, postage stamps, and cigarette pictures. If inquisitiveness does not take the place of acquisitiveness, indeed, there is a danger that in thickly-populated countries some of the most beautiful birds and butterflies will cease altogether to exist. There are not enough goldfinches or kingfishers to go round, if even a small proportion of us wish to decorate a cage with the one or a hat with the other. It is much the same with Red Admirals and Painted Ladies among the butterflies. If we prefer head-hunting to the finer sort of science in these matters, there will soon be no Red Admirals or Painted Ladies left, except in the glass cases of collectors. Collecting the eggs of birds would clearly, if it became general, lead to the diminution, if not to the extermination, of many charming birds. Hence, I think that here, too, it is well that we are gradually becoming less acquisitive as we become more inquisitive. There is no other way of preserving the nightingale and the willow-wren as English birds. I confess I delight in looking at a collection of birds' eggs, but I doubt if the possession of the loveliest egg in the world is worth the song of a single hedge-sparrow. And that is the measure of the price that must be paid for it, if all the young naturalists now growing up can take no

pleasure in looking into a nest without robbing it. One of the first human instincts is to kill or to destroy. The child will often tear down a robin's nest for the sheer pleasure of tearing it down, and the grown-up child with a gun regards birds merely as things to be shot. The second human instinct is to steal, and most of us find it difficult to look at a pretty bird's egg without coveting it. There are men, indeed, who are not content with one egg, but must take the whole clutch. Some of them go further and collect the nests as well. The experience of thousands of years, however, has slowly taught us that there are pleasures even finer than killing or stealing, and that, apart from this, killing and stealing now are against the general interest. Not that we could seriously accuse the old-fashioned naturalist of being either a murderer or a thief. After all, Richard Jefferies shot kingfishers, and as good men as he have robbed birds' nests. The furthest that we can go is to say that bird's-nesting on a large scale, like head-hunting, is no longer expedient. If you must collect birds' eggs, however—and I do not see how you can be expected to resist so exquisite a temptation—why not imitate a child I know who collects the broken shells that fall out of the nests when the young birds are hatched? I saw this child's collection lately—every broken shell carefully laid in cotton-wool in a matchbox—the egg of a greater spotted woodpecker, a little owl, a pheasant, a partridge, a robin, a thrush, a blackbird, and a wren—and I assure you it was one of the most attractive collections I have ever set eyes on.

## XIV. On Being Rather Ill

THERE are people who seem positively to benefit from an illness. They grow in moral stature as they dwindle in physical health. A well-known journalist wrote an article recently, in which he described how, as he lay ill of influenza, all his wasted years passed before his imagination so that he was filled with a determination to become a better man. I envied him as I read, for I, too, was ill at the time and should have liked to think that my sufferings were doing me some good. But, alas, when I am ill, it is not so much my past as my present that troubles me. I repent of my sins most easily when I am feeling fairly well. When I am ill I am far more interested in what the doctor hears through the stethoscope than in the flutterings of my conscience. I do not mean to say that I never feel the slight pang that is the symptom of a desire for a better life. But almost any other ache can make me forget it. I am not one of those moral giants who can enjoy a bad conscience and a bad toothache at the same time. I am not sure, indeed, that illness does not entirely unfit me for the higher life. I become self-centred, impatient, incapable of even a moderately noble thought. There are invalids who, when they are in pain, try to hide the fact from other people. I, on the contrary, like other people to know about

my sufferings. I am even, I suspect, inclined to exaggerate them. If a friend calls, I at once tell him where the pain is, what the doctor said, and the still worse things I discovered in the medical dictionary. There is no use in anyone's coming to see me when I am ill if he wishes to talk about the style of Plato or the rhythm of Sir Thomas Browne. I do not object to a little light gossip, but even that wearies if he does not pause now and then to say something about the matter which is occupying my thoughts, which is my illness. It is true that conversation with an invalid about his illness should be tactful. The visitor, on coming into the room, if he has been to see you before, should say, "You're looking a lot better." Long before M. Coué was ever heard of, invalids were made new men by that simple formula. Again, as often as you have deftly worked the conversation back to yourself and your illness, the visitor should find an opportunity to interject some such remark as "You're a much better colour to-day," or "You've lost that puffy look," or "Your eye seems almost normal." I cannot commend the bedside manner of a portrait painter who came to see me, and, on hearing what I was suffering from, said, "You knew old Fudge, didn't you? That's what he had. I remember, when I was painting him, Dr. So-and-so pointed out the symptoms to me." Then, in a jaunty vein of reminiscence, "He was dead in six months." Now, all men are mortal, and old Fudge was a man; therefore old Fudge was mortal. But I do not think the sick-room is the place for rubbing these things in. What I want, when I

am ill, is to be made to look on the bright side of things—to hear about the old Fudges who recovered and lived till they were ninety. On the day after the gruesome reminiscences of the painter, I was to be the victim of another conversation equally tactless. I was allowed to get up and was lying on a sofa, wondering whether I should be able to get to Ascot, when Mrs. Apjohn, the cook, put her head round the door. "Excuse me, sir," she said: "you won't mind if I speak to you?" "Not a bit," said I, thinking she had some complaint to make and that she could find no one else to make it to. She came a yard or two into the room and, looking a little nervous, said, "You *will* take care of yourself, sir, won't you?" "Oh, yes. Rather," I said, surprised almost into inarticulateness; "I'm feeling all right again." She lowered her eyelids sadly. "Mr. Apjohn," she said slowly, looking at the floor, "didn't take care of himself, and I lost him. You won't mind my speaking, sir?" "Good gracious, no," I assured her; "it's very good of you." But, as she turned her back and walked slowly out of the room, I seized my pipe and smoked like a steam-engine for some minutes till the effect of her words had partly worn off.

On the whole, I think, doctors are the best company when one is moderately ill. I liked even the big, bullying, white-bearded specialist who mistook me during the war for a conscientious objector because I had not had my hair cut, and jeered at the notion that there was anything whatever the matter with me. He kept on talking about conscientious objectors, while what I wanted to talk about was my

heart. "There's many a man thinks he has a conscience," he declared gruffly, "when all that's the matter with him is that he needs a blue pill." I tried to disembarrass him of the idea that I had a conscience, but he only grunted and looked at me as suspiciously as an angry bull. "Are you sure?" he said, in a strong Scottish accent; "do you never think that *you're* right and that everybody else is wrong?" "Oh, often," I admitted, in some surprise—for, indeed, it was a notion that had often occurred to me. "I thought so," he said, nodding his head and staring at me gloomily; "do you ever feel the world's going straight to the devil?" "Yes, rather," I assured him, as genially as I could. "Aye," he said, nodding disgustedly, "I thought so. Come here," he bade me sternly; and he led me over to the corner of the consulting room where a portrait of Carlyle was hanging on the wall. He waved his arm vehemently at the face of the wicked old dyspeptic in the picture. "Take off the beard," he roared at me, "and there ye are. Stummick! Stummick! Stummick!" There are men who would have been humiliated by such outrageous behaviour on the part of a doctor who was charging three guineas for his insults; but, as for me, I was delighted to hear the opinion that there was nothing seriously wrong with me expressed in such vigorous language. The old doctor also pleased me because, as often as I mentioned what I considered a rather alarming symptom, he brushed it aside with a mocking laugh and declared that he had had it himself since he was eighteen years old. As he showed me to the doorstep

he told me, if I couldn't get into the Army, to go for a row every morning on the pond in Regent's Park. I confess, when he said that, I began to sympathize with Naaman the leper. I always expect a doctor to give me at least a bottle, for it is much easier to drink "one sixteenth part three times a day after meals" than to row a boat in a London park. I am one of those people who row windmill-fashion, and in whose hands the oars describe huge circles instead of skimming like swallows along the surface of the water. In the circumstances there was nothing to be done but to consult another specialist who would give me a more sensible prescription. I found one without much difficulty, who ordered me to drink claret with my meals. "A man like you needs a stimulant," he declared with a firmness that impressed me. I found drinking claret much easier than rowing a boat in Regent's Park. Would that all doctors would remember how frail a creature is man, and would order their patients to do something that is within ordinary human capacity!

As a matter of fact, I rather like obeying a doctor's orders, if only they are reasonable and do not interfere too much with my habits. It gives me positive pleasure to be told to drink white wine instead of red, or to substitute orange juice for milk in my tea. To carry out instructions of this kind is like playing a new game. And, besides, I can easily persuade myself that I prefer orange juice to milk and white wine to red. On the whole, I think, the most interesting of all cures are those which rearrange one's diet. Every meal becomes

pleasantly full of little rocks and shoals that have to be skilfully steered past—soup, fried fish, rice pudding, fruit, coffee. What, you may ask, is left to eat? But, indeed, I have never known a diet that did not mainly consist in avoiding the things one did not like. Who really cares for soup? Who for rice pudding? These are but a legacy from barbarous ages. I am content if a doctor leaves me a meal of two dishes, and I do not much mind what these are, provided they are not boiled cod and blancmange. But, to be honest, I also expect a doctor to give me something in a bottle. I have seldom known a bottle that did not make me feel a great deal better within twenty-four hours. There is no other such convenient way of regaining health. The fine thing about taking medicine is that it wastes no time. To be told to chew one's food is in comparison to be set a Herculean task. It is, so far as my experience goes, impossible to chew and at the same time to enjoy one's meals. The very act of chewing gives a man a sullen, selfish air and makes him look like a sulky cow. Conversation and chewing do not go together. Conversation is possible at meals, indeed, only because the best people do not chew. As soon as you begin chewing you are lost as a social being. The great Fletcher ended, you will remember, by chewing —or as he called it, insalivating—even wine. It may be, of course, that men, like cows, were intended to eat their meals in silence, or, at least, with no noise but of munching. Man is the only animal, I believe, who pretends he is thinking of other things while he is eating. Compare a number of human beings at the

table with a number of hens and chickens at the trough, and you will see how far man has travelled from the simplicities of the poultry-yard. The fowl makes no pretence that it is eating for any other reason than to satisfy its hunger. Man, on the other hand, is so ashamed of his appetite that he would blush to be caught abstracting delicacies from his neighbour's plate, as a chicken or any child of nature would do. At the same time, this pretence of indifference to food—of not minding your neighbour's having taken a larger or more attractive portion of chicken—is what has made man civilized. And, if he is taught to think so much about his food as positively to chew it, I cannot see how he can fail to revert to barbarism. Hence I trust the doctors will stick to their old-fashioned bottles of medicine, and to pills, plasters and poultices, all of which are consistent with the enjoyment of the finer pleasures of the table.

The great charm of medicine is that it is so easy to take it. It is not like being told to walk to the office every day, or to perform physical exercises after one's bath, or to go to bed at ten, or to take a holiday at Carlsbad. The doctor who is not content to be a medicine-man, or magician, adds immeasurably to the difficulties of being an invalid. In my secret heart, I agree with all he says about fresh air, exercise, chewing, and moderation in tobacco. But let him not deceive himself into thinking that he is not giving me the very deuce of a time—the very deuce of a time. On this note of querulousness I end.

## XV. What Everybody is Talking About

THERE are two kinds of things about which people talk. There are the permanent subjects of conversation—the weather, ghosts, women, food, clothes, scandal, places, and horses; and, lest these should grow monotonous, there is a continuous stream of new subjects, which begin as sensations and in a comparatively short time subside into accepted commonplaces. Once, it is probable, men and women could talk about nothing but forks. The invention of the fork must have been sufficiently exciting to have been the theme of every dinner-table. Mistakes in its use must have been the cause of a great deal of merriment, and, indeed, the use of the fork is capable of becoming a theme of light conversation even to-day, as when you go to Italy and see the Italians feeding themselves with macaroni. But the fork in itself is no longer anything worth talking about. We take it for granted at table, and do not even trouble to refer to it afterwards, unless one of the guests behaves rather oddly with it (as, alas, he never does !)—tries to split a walnut with it, say, or absent-mindedly slips it into his pocket. The umbrella is another invention that, on its first appearance in the streets of eighteenth-century London, was a matter of sensational interest to the gossips. I have read somewhere that the first man who

carried one was pelted with stones. Yet umbrellas in themselves are now as completely dead a subject as forks, and it is only when an umbrella is blown inside out or stolen that it attracts any attention. Similarly with men's hats. The ordinary hat is absolutely uninteresting so long as it remains on a man's head, and somebody has to sit on it or some wind to carry it off in order to raise so much as a smile. There were hundreds of men wearing hats in Kew Gardens when I was there recently, but the only interesting hat in the place was one that had been blown into the duck-pond, at the edge of which a bare-headed young man walked up and down, very sad and obviously wondering whether it would sink or be carried by the wind to the other side of the pond first. Nearly everything that we use or wear depends in the same way on accident for such interest as it may cause. A dress-tie becomes interesting only if it becomes undone, and even a bootlace, if it comes untied, immediately becomes a subject of interest to everybody in the street. Walk down the Strand with a bootlace trailing in the mud, and you will be surprised at the number of people who will stop you to tell you about it. And, for one person who tells you about it, there are a hundred who have noticed it and would tell you if they dared.

In recent years, the inventions about which people have talked with the greatest eagerness have been for the most part mechanical. Occasionally, when woman has been more outrageous in her fashions than usual, as when she wore the hobble-skirt, the theme of the hour has been dress ; and there have been a number

of games, from ping-pong to "beaver," that have been talked about more, perhaps, than they deserved. But the most marvellous inventions of our time have been the motor-car, the aeroplane, the cinematograph, the gramophone, the pianola, wireless, and now—the latest development of wireless—"listening-in." We may dislike the new invention, but we cannot help being interested in it. To sit for the first time in the room with a "loud-speaker," as it begins to bubble like a pot of boiling porridge, is an exciting experience, even though it brings us nothing but a piece of bad music strangled. In a hundred years this sort of thing may have become so stale that men and women will hastily withdraw from a room in which noises are produced that have no virtue save that they have come from afar. But to-day the novelty is everything, and we should remain to the end, were the music nothing but "Dolly Gray" as a cornet solo. The population of London is at present divided into those who have listened-in, and those who have not. Every schoolboy wants a listening-in apparatus for his next birthday, and even men with white hairs are not happy till they have stocked their homes with the new means for making two—nay, twenty thousand—noises grow where one grew before. Saints and scholars gather in a room in a buzz of interest to hear something that is not worth saying, merely because it is being said from America. Pianolas are abandoned and gramophones left to rust in order that we may hear a Senator two thousand miles away—or is America further than that?—uttering a platitude that we would not endure from a

Methodist minister at home. We should pay attention to every word of Dr. Frank Crane himself if only his talks were "broadcasted" across the Atlantic. We are playing with a new toy, and we shall go on talking about it enthusiastically till it has become as ordinary a part of our surroundings as electric light or the telephone. And then we shall talk about something else—the seven-league boots, perhaps, or the cloak of invisibility that some inventor will have given us by that time. One thing at least is certain. We shall always run after what is new, and, when it is no longer new, we shall cease to run after it. Did we not get tired even of switchback railways? Yet it is difficult to believe that anybody will ever invent anything more wonderful than the switchback railway.

Listening-in, however, is not the only conversational theme of the hour. Relativity is still sufficiently unintelligible to the average man to amuse him, and psycho-analysis has provided him with a *chronique scandaleuse* of the sub-conscious from which he will not find it easy to tear himself away for several more seasons. But, at the moment, it is neither of relativity nor of psycho-analysis that men, women and children are talking. The theme that is everywhere on men's, women's and children's lips is an ancient Egyptian King called Tutankhamen, of whom, till the year 1922, I confess I had never heard. Yet here I find myself in 1923 more deeply interested in him—temporarily, at least—than in Henry the Eighth or in Nebuchadnezzar. He was, I have no doubt, a famous man during his life, but his fame during his life was a trifle compared to

the fame that he has won through the fact that his grave has been disturbed by an English peer three thousand years afterwards. School teachers declare that, in the lesson on the history of the week, the children clamour: "Tell us about Tutankhamen!" Those who arrange courses of lectures for the people living in the poorest parts of East London say that no lecturer can draw a greater crowd than the man who is willing to talk about Tutankhamen. Yet not one in a hundred of those who are so eager to hear all about Tutankhamen has ever taken the trouble to pay a visit to the Egyptian antiquities in the British Museum. What is it, then, just now that draws their imaginations so inquisitively to the Valley of the Kings? Is it the element of accident that has made a novelty of the ancient world—the accidental discovery of a treasure-house? Or is it the story of the buried treasure itself that has made King Tutankhamen a hero of the hour? Should we be so excited if it had only been a lost play of Æschylus or a lost life of Plutarch that had been discovered in the tomb instead of caskets filled with royal robes and necklaces, and jewelled thrones, and ceremonial gilt couches, and chariots of which the wheels are sheathed with thin gold? Perhaps the discovery even of these things would not have startled us into such universal admiration had it not been for those white boxes of mummified food that were found in the dead king's tomb. Joints of meat and trussed ducks three thousand years old touch chords of sympathy in us that bring us to closer terms with Tutankhamen than with any of the other Pharaohs. But, indeed, the

discoveries in the Valley of the Kings contain almost all the elements that we find in the good stories. There is the treasure-hunt theme, the luxury theme, the food theme, the mystery theme, and the tomb theme—every theme, indeed, except the love theme, unless we can interpret the bouquet, "withered to the usual dark brown colour," which was brought out of the tomb, in that sense.

Here, too, are mysteries of survival such as have always interested the imagination, for the spectacle of long survival is almost the most wonderful thing we can conceive after immortality itself. If the mummy of a trussed duck can live three thousand years, why should a man's soul not live for ever? The thought may be illogical, but, in the vague minds of human beings, survival easily confuses itself with immortality. And the mummy of the trussed duck brings the miracle of survival home to us better even than the mummy of Pharaoh. The discovery of so trivial a thing that has nevertheless withstood such a multitude of years, has the sharp interest of an accident. The tomb, indeed, is alive while it is giving forth its secrets. It is not wrapped in the death-like stillness of a museum. Things are happening as in a growing garden, or as in a conjuring show, and we wait expectantly for the unexpected—the appearance of something strange or simple beyond our dreams. In this mood, we are no less astonished by the discovery of a three-thousand-year-old glove than of a three-thousand-year-old royal couch, and we greedily read the speculations of the discoverers as to whether the glove is a child's

glove, or whether it has shrunk with time as kings and reputations shrink. If only the museums could surprise us in the same fashion, how we should crowd into them all the year round! But they have no movement, no accidental stir out of their eternal sleep, and we can put off a further acquaintance with them as easily as we can stay away from church or hide from a bore. Yet there is not a museum or an art gallery in the world that cannot become a place of universal interest under the invigorating breath of accident. People who had never visited the Louvre before to see the "Mona Lisa," visited it in order to see the space on the wall from which the "Mona Lisa" had been stolen. Great works of art to which we have been indifferent all our lives become exciting and real to us as soon as they are stolen or threatened with destruction or removal. How many pictures have become world-famous, not because of their proper beauty, but because there was a danger of their being sold to some rich American and carried away as a spoil for ever! While pictures remain in the undisturbed safety of a great gallery, however, we can neglect them with no sense of loss. And, no doubt, in time the treasures from the tomb in the Valley of the Kings will take their place among the wonderful things that have lost their wonder and will interest us as little as a stuffed bird in a seaside lodging-house. The stillness of neglect will settle on them. They may have changed a paragraph in history, but it is not certain that we shall read history, and Tutankhamen will pass out of the newspapers into the ever-increasing oblivion that has swallowed up

the Tichborne claimant and the Velasquez "Venus," and all things good and evil to which accident has given a brief life on the tongues of men. This does not mean that great discoveries are worthless, but merely that conversation changes. Let us talk while we can about Tutankhamen and the mummy of the trussed duck. The time may come when these things will bore us, and when they will have existence only in a glass case, and no longer in the eager tittle-tattle of women, men and children.

## XVI. The Battle of Footerloo

THE most sensational Cup Final in history! That is what everybody kept saying to everybody else over and over again.

It would, perhaps, be an exaggeration to say that Wembley Park was turned into a battlefield; but, as the stretcher-bearers bore the seeming corpses one after another through the crowd and out of the ground, it looked considerably more like a battlefield than like a football-field.

Nowhere but in England—perhaps, nowhere but in London—would it have been possible to have had so many of the elements of a riot without the riot itself actually taking place.

A part of the crowd undoubtedly behaved badly, but it did not behave nearly so badly as it might have behaved. The Londoner is a moderate man even in his disorderly moments. He is content to rush a policeman without hurting him.

The London police are also a body of moderate men. They are content to spend an hour in pushing, pressing, and persuading a mob back into its proper place, instead of scattering it in one crowded minute of glorious life by more violent methods and leaving the plain strewn with broken skulls, as the police in more excitable lands might do. There were only 1,000 casualities at the Cup Final. That is really a great tribute to everybody.

And what a setting for such scenes! The Stadium—which, as the programme informed us, is equal in area to the Biblical city of Jericho —was like a huge bowl up the inside of which human beings were packed as human beings have never been packed before, even at a football match.

They were packed so closely in the popular stands that you could see only their faces and their hats, and you could not see even these. Each face was a mere pebble in a bank of shingle that seemed fifty times higher than any bank of shingle that was ever cast up by the tides of a thousand years.

Or, if you prefer the comparison, the crowd on the distant terraces, as the sun shone on it, looked like a gigantic mass of uncooked sweetbreads that wobbled continually as a new crowd poured into it.

It was mostly composed of men and boys in their ordinary clothes. But some of them wore paper caps of red, white and blue in their enthusiasm for West Ham, and a few wore white and blue top-hats in honour of Bolton Wanderers. There were also all kinds of favours—rosettes and metal cups decorated with the ribbons of the rival teams—bought from hawkers on the way and worn in the button-hole. And every other man or boy seemed to have a rattle.

This is an instrument of torture that, as it is whirled round and round, makes a noise like a rack. When I arrived at the Stadium, about one o'clock, thousands of men and boys were already whirling rattles. Those who had no rattles yelled. Those who could not yell

cheered. Those who could not cheer joined in whistling a fox-trot that the band of the Irish Guards seemed to be playing—it was almost audible—in the middle of the green field.

There was, indeed, something for everybody to do, and, though one could not quite make out what the people who yelled were yelling, or what the people who cheered were cheering, one guessed that it had something to do with the respective merits of West Ham or Bolton Wanderers, and everybody seemed to be extraordinarily happy about it.

And the sun shone, and the green field, that had circles and parallelograms beautifully painted on it in whitewash, was lovely as a tennis-lawn in a country garden. How fair a scene! Is it any wonder that, in presence of this virgin greensward, and in the season of the first lilacs and the first nightingales, yell after yell went round the ground, with cheer after cheer following it, and always to the noble accompaniment of a multitude of rattles that sounded like the voices of a million demented corncrakes?

Suddenly the peace of the scene was broken in upon by the spectacle of a policeman running. To see a policeman running is, I think, next to hearing of a declaration of war, the most exciting experience of which a human being is capable. This policeman, as he tore with long legs along the cinder track, was obviously running for help.

Looking over towards one of the two-shilling stands, one saw that men were tumbling like sheep over the railings of the stands and tussling with policemen, who tried in vain to

keep them from seizing upon seats that did not belong to them.

Other police hurried up, and, though they could not drive the invasion back, at least they prevented it from becoming any worse. And rattles rattled, and larynxes and pharynxes made all the noises of which the human throat is capable. And the ambulance men came on to the field under the red cross of Geneva and carried off the wounded.

Then, at the other side of the field, we caught sight of another policeman running, and we could see that the same kind of thing was happening over there, only worse. I cannot help thinking that the people who leaped over the barriers were to a great extent innocent people. After all, human beings were pouring down upon them from behind like a score of Alpine torrents. The police attempted to drive them back, but you might as well have attempted to drive a man through the eye of a needle. And once more the ambulance men came on to the field and carried off the wounded.

Even so, the crowd had as yet seized only a small piece of the rim of the cinder-track surrounding the field. They sat down and dug themselves in. The police caught a few of them by the collars and tried to force them back. The others rose and advanced at a run five yards further and dug themselves in again.

Other parts of the ground found the example infectious, and on all sides the crowd could be seen leaping over the railings as easily as a high tide leaps over a breakwater on a stormy day. And, as they leaped, others leaped on their backs and drove them to the very touch-line.

And policemen ran. And one of them began to work hard at a telephone. And the ambulance men came on and carried off the wounded.

It was plain by this time that something extraordinary had happened, and rumours from the outside spoke of furious crowds that had found the gates closed and had broken them down. A man who had just arrived told me: "There are thousands of people out there spitting blood because they can't get in —thousands of people who have paid for their tickets."

Alas, they got in all right. Never did the ancient Goths and the Ostrogoths and the Visigoths sweep down upon the green places of Europe as this horde of invaders swept into our little Biblical city of Jericho.

They spread over the grass of the playing-field like locusts. Others streamed in after them, and before long there was such a mob of men collected on the field that scarcely any grass was visible except a little green oasis in the middle of the ring of bandsmen, who were gallantly playing a tune that nobody could hear.

A crash overhead made the people in the covered stand look up and told them that one bold invader had even got on to the roof. He had fallen through, the brave fellow, and we could see his legs kicking from the waist downwards.

The crowd in the stands were now yelling their opinion of the crowd on the field at the top of 127,000 voices. To judge by the language of the man who was standing behind me, the

opinion was unfavourable. I think he was one of the invaders, who had broken into the Press gallery, but he wanted to see the match. Luckily the crowd on the field was unable to hear him. Otherwise I feel sure it would have resented some of the things he said. He was not content to use words like "blooming," or "dashed," or even "blinking," and he accused them of quite unmentionable vices. I was glad that the sound of rattles, motor-horns, yells, and whistles partially drowned the more lurid passages in the most eloquent monologue to which it has ever been my privilege to listen.

Into the black sea on the grass, blue lines of policemen, hurried up from London, began to insinuate themselves, the crowds on the stands loudly cheering them, and whirling their rattles. But by this time no one any longer believed that the ground could be cleared by foot-police. Old gentlemen with militarist leanings called for fixed bayonets and cavalry charges.

It was as though the stands and the grass were at war with each other. We boohed the invaders as no villain of melodrama was ever boohed. And we waved our rattles to fortify the booh. The blasphemous man behind me had by this time begun to use words that I could understand only with an effort. And the ambulance men came on and carried off the wounded.

Then the first horse-policeman arrived. Had he been Steve Donoghue bringing in a winner of the Derby, he could not have been received with such a pandemonium of yells and rattles.

If the little Biblical city of Jericho was to be saved, he was the man to do it, and, as three or four more horsemen came into view, the people who had got in legally roared the roar of victory and began to abuse the people who had got in illegally more vehemently than ever.

Alas, for the rarity of Christian charity! I fear that the dearest dream of many of us just at that moment was a new and successful Charge of the Light Brigade.

When King George arrived and appeared in his red box it was as though a temporary truce had been declared between the party of law and the party of disorder. The fifty thousand Wat Tylers on the field roared "God Save The King!" and waved their hats and arms. Seen from above, it looked as if all the pebbles on the Brighton beach were standing up on their ends and shouting.

Immediately afterwards, however, the war was renewed with increased vigour, and, as the horsemen swept on to the field, the more timid spirits on the outskirts began to drift away under the arches and to make for home.

Even so, the field still remained black with people, and, as one section of the crowd retreated before the teeth and the tails of the horses another section flowed in and took its place.

There was one policeman on a white horse who was a perfect genius, and who could himself keep a crowd of at least a thousand moving. He butted them with the horse's tail, he pushed at them with the horse's sides, he rode straight at them with the horse's mouth. And the animal did all that he told it to do as cleverly as the cleverest circus-pony,

and advanced into the mob with as little fear as though it had been a tank.

The foot-police now began to take the crowd in sections, and joining hands with an occasional sailor or well-wisher, attempted to recover the field from the invaders yard by yard.

"Look, the crowd has begun to fight the police!" somebody cried hopefully, and, just below us, one man had certainly begun to fight with one policeman.

It was during this excitement that I saw the extraordinary spectacle of a man walking and scrambling over the heads of the spectators on one of the stands, as over a solid floor, determined, I suppose, to get out and to get home, lest a worse thing should befall him. He was, I understand, taken to hospital.

It was about the same time that a man bumped into me, and, as though to test me, held out his hand with a broad grin, and said, "Good old Lancashire!" His friend, who followed him, also bumped into me, and gripped me by the hand, and said knowingly, with a still broader grin, "Good old Lancashire!" I did not dare to contradict him. But the bones of my hand ached protestingly.

Just as we were wondering whether the Cup Final could be played at all, the teams came out into the thick of the mob, carrying two little nut-coloured balls, and the crowd made a narrow laneway for them and slapped every man of them enthusiastically on the back as he made his way through to be introduced to the King. I should not care to be slapped on the back by ten thousand men from Bolton. Or, for that matter, by ten thousand men from

West Ham. Or, indeed, by ten thousand men from anywhere.

Once more the rattles rattled, the vocal cords vociferated, the horse-police butted, the foot-police pushed, a man with a megaphone megaphoned (though nobody could hear him), and the ambulance men carried off the wounded. And still the man on the white horse was riding up and down, driving boys and men before him like chaff before the wind, and the crowds on the stands ululated with joy as little pools of green became visible and expanded into little ponds and gradually into little lakes.

Meanwhile each of the teams was practising at dribbling and passing and shooting goals as unconcernedly as though they did not know that they were surrounded on all sides by tens of thousands of people in conflict with the police. The sun had gone out by now, and it was cold, and Seddon danced his knees up and down like pistons to keep himself warm. Other players stretched their legs or jumped up and down like children or juggled the ball on their toes.

At length the crowd on one side of the field was driven back to the touch-line, and amid a wild tumult of cheers the man on the white horse rode among the mob like a god of victory and even butted people out of the net behind the goal posts. Slowly but surely chains of police were pressing back other sections of the crowd north, east, and west off the field of play.

Then, wonder of wonders, we saw the captains meeting in the middle of the field for the toss, and, amid a tumult of yells, rattles, and noises

for which there are no words in the English language, it became evident that the toss had been won by Bolton Wanderers.

As for the football that followed, how mild a game it seemed after so sensational a prologue! To be sure, a shout went up to heaven from a hundred thousand throats when Jack, of Bolton, shot that lightning ball through the goal posts in the first few minutes of the game. And there were shouts from ten thousand other throats when the West Hammers in their claret-and-blue shirts drove up like a stormy sea towards the Bolton goal only to break again and again on backs that would let no dangerous ball pass them.

But even these things were hardly so exciting as when the crowd began to surge back on to the field of play, and the match had to be held up while the police once more hurried up reinforcements and drove the interlopers back to the touch-line.

After that there were many moments of exciting play, as Finney or Vizard took the ball on his toe and looked as though he could keep three balls going at a time, like a great conjurer. But the game as a whole was hardly exciting; indeed, it had scarcely started when thousands of the spectators began to stream homewards, some of them because they could see nothing, others because they had seen quite enough for one day in the life of any human being. "A damned farce!" said one elderly gentleman, as he clambered out of the grand stand, and so home.

Yet to the Bolton Wanderers, swift as deer in their white shirts and blue shorts, it was

evident that not the scenes but the football was the one thing of interest in the day. And when, in the second half, J. R. Smith scored their second goal in a flash so swift that for a moment men doubted it, his fellow-players ran up to him as though they would have embraced him, and, as he passed from one congratulating hand to another, he was like a man dancing through the grand chain in a set of lancers.

And that, for all practical purposes, was the end of it. And, shortly afterwards, the crowd was back in a rush over the grass, cheering the Cup as it was handed to the winners, roaring "God Save The King!" and moving like a great army out of the Stadium, and leaving that beautiful green field littered with paper, like Hampstead Heath after a Bank Holiday.

I did not leave the ground until twenty minutes to seven, and even then there were still a few stragglers left.

Thus ended the bloodless battle of Footerloo.

## XVII. Second Thoughts on the Cup Final

IT is reported that several persons on their way home from the somewhat unusual Cup Final at Wembley Park were heard announcing bitterly, "Never again!" They must have meant that never again would they travel back to London by the Great Central Railway. To travel on a non-stop train that stops oftener than any train ever stopped before, and to have to stand on one leg at a time in an over-overcrowded carriage that takes an hour to perform a ten minutes' journey, is a hateful way to end even the most entrancing day. I should not have minded so much if it had not been for the tunnel just outside Marylebone. It is the darkest tunnel in the world, and the railway company gave us no lights. It was also exceedingly hot, with the windows shut and from fifteen to twenty people trapped in the carriage, like fowls in a crate. Even the songs and cheers that the timid raised from time to time in other parts of the train in order to keep up their spirits did nothing to relieve the gloom. It was a region of Hell in which Dante might have placed a political opponent whom he disliked excessively. "Never again!" said I, as, distorted out of my natural shape and drooping over like a candle that has been exposed to great heat, I finally squeezed my

way out on to Marylebone platform. "Next time I will travel by Baker Street."

As for the scenes at the Wembley Stadium, they were of the kind that are by common consent described as deplorable, but that nobody who escaped from them without a broken leg would have missed for worlds. It is fortunate that it was not known in advance that they were going to happen. If it had been, there would have been ten times as many people present, and the consequences might have been serious. Someone has said that the disturbances were a bad advertisement for the Stadium. I am of the opposite opinion. If the Wembley authorities could promise a sensation on as huge a scale for the next Cup Final, it would pay the transport companies to run special trains for the occasion from every station in England, Scotland and Wales and special boats from Ireland. I commend the notion to Mr. Fred E. Bussy, who, I see, has resigned his directorship on the "Daily Mail" in order to become Managing Director of Wembley Amusements, Ltd. It will take Wembley Amusements, Ltd., all their time to live up to the high standard set at the Cup Final, even though the heading of an article in the "Empire Exhibition News," the official organ of Wembley, announces :

*Mr. F. E. Bussy to spend* £600,000 *in bringing new sensations to Wembley's Fun City.*

I doubt whether, even with £600,000 at his disposal, Mr. Bussy will ever again be able to bring to Wembley's Fun City such a sensation

as the crowd at the Cup Final brought there for nothing. Still, it must be admitted, the scenes were in strict accordance with his own previously announced ideals. "In the past," he said at a luncheon given in his honour at the Savoy Hotel some weeks ago, "I have been administering the powder in jam. I look forward with great pleasure to the opportunity I have now offered of purveying jam de luxe at Wembley." Well, if we had not jam de luxe at Wembley on Saturday, we shall never have it in this world. It was the jam of a quarter of a million human beings that caused all the excitement.

Since escaping from Wembley, I have been reading the literature of the British Empire Exhibition, so ably edited by Mr. T. Foster, with exceptional interest, and I find recurring in it again and again strong hints that the Exhibition authorities had for some time been quietly planning to open the Stadium with something more exciting than a mere game of association football. "The Cup Final," they say frankly, in one of their sheets, distributed to journalists before the game, "is something more than a football match." Truer word was never spoken. The Cup Final was a great deal more than a football match. It was more like a scene in the House of Commons or a battle I once saw at a pageant between the armies of Boadicea and of (I think) Julius Cæsar. Considering that the Wembley Park news service told us so plainly in advance that it was going to be something more than a football match, I do not see how the fact that it turned out to be something more than a football

match can now be imputed to them as a crime. They even hinted pretty broadly at what the nature of that "something more" was going to be. "Over 125,000 spectators," their news service promised us, "will be able to view the happenings in the arena." When one reads such a phrase as "happenings in the arena," one's thoughts instinctively turn to the Colosseum in which battles (including naval engagements) were arranged for the amusement of a public in whom the love of sport had been developed to a fine point. It would be an exaggeration to describe what actually occurred at Wembley as a battle, but what made it exciting was that it was a potential battle. As the crowds tumbled over the barriers and swept like a dark flood over the green plain of the football field, and as file after file of police tramped on to the ground, followed by mounted police on horses positively dancing for action, every one with the slightest tinge of optimism believed that it was only by a miracle that fighting on a large scale could now be averted. How heartening was the scene! How the blood leaped even in veins so pacific as my own! I am sure Sir Travers Clarke, deputy chairman of the Board of the British Empire Exhibition, was speaking for nine out of ten of us when he gleefully told a Pressman:

> My own impression when I got in, close on three o'clock, was what a marvellous sight and how jolly every one seemed, and, looking at it through the right spectacles, it was a jolly crowd, which enjoyed itself thoroughly, despite all the inconveniences to which it was put.

I take it that Sir Travers, in saying this, did not pretend to speak for the thousand or so

casualties—not, at least, for those (after all, a mere handful) who had their legs or ribs broken. But, as one closely in touch with Wembley Amusements, Ltd., he did undoubtedly speak for practically everybody who was not carried off the field on a stretcher. You cannot conceive what a difference it makes whether you see a jolly event of this kind from a safe seat on the grand stand or out of the corner of your eye as you wake up out of a swoon and find yourself lying on a stretcher under a tarpaulin with a broken bone and being carried feet foremost off the field under the red cross of Geneva to the nearest hospital. Who shall say which is the truer view of the situation? All things are relative, and Sir Travers Clarke has surely as much right to feel jolly as the man under the tarpaulin has to feel gloomy. I confess that I myself had a queasy sort of feeling in my stomach when what I had looked forward to in my innocence as a game of football turned out to be played for the most part, not by footballers, but by stretcher-bearers. When you look down and see a face as the face of one dead lying back on a stretcher, and a man, craning over your shoulder, exclaims, "Hullo! it's a girl. . . . No, it's a bloke," and swift as a weaver's shuttle the stretcher flies backwards and forwards, the cumulative effect is really rather horrible. Apart from the casualties, however, I agree with Sir Travers Clarke that it was all very jolly. And, if you think of it, how jolly war itself would be only for the casualties!

I regret to see that the Home Secretary in the House of Commons has been doing his

best to take the colours out of the picture which those of us who were present at the scenes at Wembley painted for ourselves and hoped to preserve for ever. He offers us, instead, a new picture constructed entirely from statistics. He tells us that, of the casualties, "only twenty-two" were taken to hospital and that, of these, "only three cases are described as serious." There is much virtue in the word "only." For instance, if the newspapers announced:

WILD SCENE IN THE COMMONS.
CABINET MINISTER KILLED.

we should see the incident as a unique and horror-striking sensation. But if they announced:

ONLY ONE CABINET MINISTER KILLED,

we should begin to think that, after all, things might have been worse and should probably end by paying a glowing tribute to the House of Commons as the best-behaved assembly in the world. One might infer from various things that have been said in the House of Commons that everything at Wembley was just short of perfect—that the police arrangements were perfect and the behaviour of the crowd perfect and the number of casualties as nearly perfect as a number of casualties could be. Poor Mr. Mosley seems to have incurred the wrath of the entire House of Commons by suggesting that the crowd, who broke down the barriers, climbed over the barbed wire, swept over the field of play, and for three-quarters of an hour withstood alike the appeals of the players and

the steady push of a large body of foot and mounted police, while they might be diamonds, were certainly rough ones. M.P.'s, for some obscure reason, lost their tempers in defence of the good temper of the mob. As a matter of fact, the mob was tolerably cheerful, but there is no need to throw bouquets to it. It behaved quite badly, it seems to me, not in breaking into the Stadium, but in invading the playing-pitch. There was not the slightest need for this. There is a wide running-track all round the field, and there was room on this for everybody present. To raid this beautiful green level and litter it with paper and orange peel was no more virtuous on the part of the crowd than to try to raid the Royal Box after the match for trophies. To idolize the crowd is even more foolish than to grow angry with it. What should make us mild in our indignation, however, is the suspicion (not entirely fanciful) that the crowd on the field was largely composed of people who had been forcibly driven out of the stands and enclosures by the crowd that had broken into the Stadium. These unfortunates had been standing in the sun for hours, packed like herrings in a barrel, when they suddenly found themselves precipitated on to the field by pressure from behind. Then the people who had seized their places stood and boohed them for preventing the game from beginning. That is undoubtedly what happened in some instances. A man who has illegally seized a place develops all of a sudden extraordinary law-abiding instincts. He becomes one of the "haves," voluble to the point of scurrility in abuse of the "have nots."

# Second Thoughts on the Cup Final

On the whole, then, most of us who were present will look back on the Cup Final as an amusing fiasco, a glorious muddle, a riot that was but little less enjoyable because it did not in the end come off. The chief objection to such scenes at a football match is that they are so much more interesting than the football. Football will lose its reputation as an exciting sport if it has to compete with that much more dangerous and thrilling game of Police *versus* People. But I am afraid all this will never be allowed to happen again. Such perfect police arrangements and such a perfect crowd can hardly recur twice in this imperfect world. Still we must trust Wembley Amusements, Ltd., to do their best.

## XVIII. In Defence

THERE have been signs lately that a new cult is coming into being. It is called ornithophobia. Its devotees are an increasing body of men and women who are in rebellion against the birds. They complain that there are more birds in poetry nowadays than in life, and that even in life there are too many of them. One swallow does not make a summer, they tell us, but two spoil a lyric. If only rook-rifles could get at a bird through the printed page, what bags of tits and robins and gold-finches and linnets these ornithophobes would bring back from their reading! They are of the same mind as a friend of mine, a musical critic, who, as he went from concert to concert and at each of them heard somebody or other singing that exquisitely beautiful song, "The Lark in Clear Air," at length announced bitterly: "Some day I'll wring that bird's neck." They have arrived at a stage of blind wrath at which they would like to see Shelley's skylark added to the ingredients of a "Cheshire Cheese" pudding, and had rather sit down to a dish of nightingales' tongues with esurient Romans than listen to the song of the bird with Keats. They must, I think, have farmers' blood in their veins and inherit the superstition that birds are a peril to men. They cannot forgive a generation that uses the pen rather

than the gun on the fowls of the air, and in their heart of hearts, no doubt, they believe that a bird is never so pretty as when it is stuffed and put in a glass case. They take it for granted, apparently, that the modern feeling for birds is out of tune with the literary tradition, and that in robuster days the poets were men who could not tell a hawk from a handsaw. On this point they are mistaken. So authoritative a naturalist as W. H. Hudson propounded in his last book the theory that Chaucer brought keener senses of sight and hearing and smell to the enjoyment of Nature than we bring to-day. "Does he [Chaucer] speak only for himself," asks Hudson, "when he writes thus of daisies and the smale foulis with their melodie and the scents of earth and leaves and flowers, or is he expressing feelings which were more common in his day than in ours?" The question is left unanswered, but it is interesting to find the tradition of imaginative naturalism taken back beyond the Georgians, beyond Shelley and Wordsworth, beyond even Shakespeare, to its perfect source in Chaucer. Hudson, it is true, draws his evidence mainly from Chaucer's references to flowers, but Chaucer himself has left us the confession that it was the singing of birds and the flowers that alone of terrestrial things had the power to tear him away from his books. He delighted so much in reading, he tells us, that there was nothing on earth

> That fro my bokes maketh me to goon,
> But hit be other upon the holy-day,
> Or elles in the joly time of May,
> Whan that I here the smale foulis singe
> And see the floures ginne for to springe—
> Farwell, my studie, as lasting that sesoun!

Whether Hudson has not exaggerated the sensitiveness of Chaucer in the presence of Nature as compared with that of later writers is a question on which there may be two opinions, but he has at least established the fact that, long before a Georgian poet had ever read the advertisements of Metro-land and was tempted to take a train out to the paradise of the birds, there lived a great poet who declared that the songs of birds were more pleasant to him

> by many fold
> Than mete or drink or any other thing.

And if the author of this last confession in "The Flower and the Leaf" was, as the scholars tell us, not Chaucer, this merely proves that there were two immortal poets who, some hundreds of years before a suburban singer had gone out into Nature with a copy of "Our Feathered Friends and How to Identify Them" in his pocket, took a rational interest in the traffic and the whistlings of the birds.

A case could be made out indeed, for the theory that the greatest ages of English poetry have been those in which literature has been a perfect aviary. "The merry larks are ploughmen's clocks" in Shakespeare, not in Pope; and in "Antony and Cleopatra," when the queen flies from the sea-fight and Antony madly follows her, Shakespeare finds the inevitable comparison for him in "a doting mallard" that, "leaving the fight, in height flies after her." No one to whom the spectacle of the birds in the air had not been more than "mete or drink or any other thing" could have written these words. It may be doubted,

indeed, whether any writer whose imagination is not bird-haunted can become a great lyric poet. The Freudians have, I am aware, lately written treatises to show that the birds in the poets are symbols of eroticism ; but as everything else in the poets is apparently a symbol of eroticism, including the horses in Browning and the machines in the verse of Mr. Kipling, this does not seem to be a convincing argument against continuing to make rhymes about larks and nightingales. The ornithophobes, I admit, have the right not to be bored. But they should ask themselves whether they might not be bored still more profoundly if birds disappeared entirely out of poetry. Every visitor to Italy complains of the impossibility of hearing the song of a bird in the olive branches without its being immediately followed by the crack of a gun. He feels that the landscape would be infinitely richer if more of those tiny yellow suns were flitting in and out among the leaves. Even in Assisi, where the fresco on the wall of the great church reminds men for ever how St. Francis once preached to the birds, you have but to walk a hundred yards to see the good-humoured man with a gun walking up and down under the olive trees and grinning from ear to ear, himself and his family, as he expects a successful shot at a bird no bigger than your finger to win the applause of the passer-by. I confess I walked past him with a scowling front. I ought not to have done so, for, after all, human beings must dine, and, apart from that, his dark face was full of a good nature on which it was sin to cast a shadow. Not, indeed, that he cared so much

as that. He probably concluded that I was a shortsighted person who had not seen the bird falling, or, perhaps, a dull-witted person who took no interest in birds. For it is one of the curious paradoxes of human nature that many of the people who have cared most for birds have been people who killed them. "Each man kills the thing he loves," said Wilde. It was certainly true in the past of most of those who loved birds. Richard Jefferies did not shrink from shooting a kingfisher, and a sportsman, writing the other day, confessed ingenuously that after shooting a blue-tit he had been moved to such agonies of tears that never again could he persuade himself to shoot anything under a thrush or a starling. Indeed, if there is an argument for the protection of birds against armed men, it is not that the armed men are any wickeder than the rest of us, but that civilization has reached a point at which either birds must cease to be shot or must cease to exist. The efficiency of man as a killer is the strongest possible reason why he should no longer be permitted to kill. It was all very well to shoot hoopoes and golden orioles when a dead hoopoe would always be succeeded by three living ones. But if the dead hoopoe is the last of the hoopoes, others than sentimentalists will feel that a wonder has vanished from the earth for the purchase of a very small pleasure.

Those of us who had rather look out for birds than for beards do not, however, need any grave arguments with which to defend ourselves. Could there be a more harmless industry than ours? Sitting with a fishing rod

at the edge of a Hampstead pond is murder compared to it, and collecting postage stamps an extravagance leading to the robbery of tills and to forged cheques. Nor could we have chosen anything prettier to look at. Our chief alternative is human beings, and the observation of human beings, it has been proved, leads even persons who are not particularly sensitive to despair. All those who have watched human beings in the mass as others of us watch birds become pessimists. The human being has many good points, but they cannot be seen through a pair of field-glasses. You cannot be said to know him until you know him by name, and so have separated him from human beings in general. How different is the green woodpecker! Any green woodpecker will do. You may see him only once in your life, as he flies from oak to oak in a pool of sunlight, the spirit of the woods and of the sun in the green and yellow of his feathers, but even so passing an acquaintance delights you as much as if he were a man of genius or a woman famed for her beauty. There is no *profanum vulgus* among the birds. Every bird is of the sacred band, and stands less in need of a name to make him live his proper life than Helen of Troy or Julius Cæsar. There are naturalists who get to know birds as individuals, and there is, no doubt, an added pleasure in watching the sweet married life of two particular goldfinches, tinkling their love from tree to tree in the garden. But few of us have ever known a long-tailed tit or a nuthatch intimately. Every nuthatch embodies the genius of its race, and, though its music be no better than

that of a busy typewriter, our ears prick up at it as eagerly as though it were the speech of angels. I should not oppose anyone who found his pleasure in beetles or in ferns rather than in birds, but I do not think he has chosen so attractive a world in which to idle. In variety, in song, in motion, in colour—at least, in the combination of these—the bird surpasses all things else. There is, apart from man, no other population that is at once so visible and so numerous. The butterfly has been called a flying flower, but it has no song. The flower of the sweet pea has been described as standing tiptoe prepared for flight, but it does not fly. The dancing of human beings is elephantine compared to the grace of a finch swimming through the high air or to the play of some Pleiades of tits in the trees in Kensington Gardens. If we abandon the birds, it must be for something worse. We may even find ourselves driven to golf and a passion for plus fours. Nature abhors a vacuum, and Satan finds some mischief still for people who do not care whether or not they see a great crested grebe to do. There are Puritans who think that if they prevent us from drinking beer and playing cards, they will make us virtuous. The ornithophobes are persuaded in the same way that if they can only compel us never to mention a tree-pipit again, we shall cease to bore them. Alas! the path to perfection is more difficult than that! The conversation of men who could not tell a coot from a moorhen is not of a kind to hold out any hope that, when all the birds have been silenced, the bores will have been silenced, too. The truth of the matter is,

each of us goes through life with a bee in his bonnet, and, if the bee is a bird there is, at least, so much less occasion to talk scandal. Human beings, insects, and wild beasts are all themes that invite scandal, but the birds are, for the most part, monogamists and lead pure lives, and even in the twentieth century no man of science has dreamed of psycho-analysing a nightingale.

## XIX. Good Friday

ONE of the earliest things I remember in connexion with Good Friday is the pleasure I used to feel in standing at the window in the afternoon and watching other people coming from church. There may be finer pleasures than that of a child who has stayed away from church or from school, but there was one child who would not have believed you if you had told him so. His subtle self-congratulation, as he saw so many boys of his own age going off to their duties or returning from them, like convicts, could be expressed in music only as a crow. It was a triumph that I enjoyed as a right on only two days in the year—Christmas Day and Good Friday—when the children of other creeds were taken to church, but the children of my creed were not. And so, as I stood in the window and watched my small contemporaries, some of them in Eton suits, and all of them in the slavery of gloves, creeping humbly homewards as mere attachments to large family parties, I rejoiced in my soul that I had been born a Presbyterian. Presbyterians are exceedingly fond—perhaps, unduly fond—of going to church, but at least they confine the practice to fifty-two days in the year, whereas in other churches one never knows on what day one may be expected to attend a service. Since those days, I am afraid, even Presbyterians have fallen from grace, and many of them behave on Christmas

morning itself as though it were a Sunday. But in the reign of Victoria we were still as the heathen at such times, and the very theatre was open on Good Friday night for the Easter pantomime.

By a curious twist, I no longer sympathize with the lean boy in the window who thanked God so lightheartedly that he was not an Episcopalian. I should not, perhaps, go so far as to go to church on Good Friday even now, but I at least go so far as to concur in a measure with those who do. I should, I am almost sure, abstain from going to the theatre on a Good Friday, if I were in a town where the theatres were open. It has ceased to give me pleasure to flout the solemnity of occasions, and it seems disproportionate to celebrate the day with nothing more than a hot cross bun, especially in this country where the bakers economize on the cross (which at home was made of a hard paste, but is here frequently a mere dent in the bread). The Easter festival, indeed—the festival of death turned into the triumph of resurrection—stirs something in the imagination that is older than the creeds in which we were born. Even if the Christian faith were to disappear, men would still look back regretfully to this part of it as to something beautiful that it would have been better for the world not to have lost. Do we not feel almost envious of the ancient Greeks, as we read the story of Proserpine, and suspect that in that story they saw more deeply into the mystery of things than we ourselves see as we walk along the knowing streets of London? Seasons return, and with them return jests about the first cuckoo and statistics about the coldest

days in March or the hottest days in March or the wettest days in March during the last half century ; but not with them returns the ancient meaning—the rising of life out of the grave. We note, with a satisfaction of the fancy, that on the first day of spring a mare called White Bud wins the Lincolnshire Handicap at 66 to 1, and are surprised that we did not foresee so inevitable an omen. But the omen of the world breaking into flower is not to be seen in the Strand, save by proxy in a basket or a shop window, and the Londoner misses at this charming point in the revolution of the months something that even the pagans did not miss. All through the winter the country has lain under the appearance of death. Black trees, brown fields, leafless hedges, flowerless banks have announced to the casual eye that the earth was a grave. Weed and fern had sunk back under the soil like melted snows. It is true that to a keener observation the buds were all the while forming in the trees and the young corn stirring in the brown earth, but faith itself, unsupported by experience, could scarcely have dared to prophesy the return of spring from omens so meagre. How many centuries must the earth have died in winter and revived in spring before man took heart sufficiently to have faith in the return of April as something in the nature of things ! Each winter he mourned that the world was dead and its fruits perished. Each spring he saw to his amazement that the world had become alive again and that it was covered as of old with leaf and flower. Slowly he began to see the chain of circumstance itself as something eternally

revolving and eternally sure, and he began to trust the earth and the stars. That, I fancy, was the beginning of his faith, and it is still preached under the dome of St. Paul's. There are those who tell him that it is based on a false analogy, and indeed most analogies are false. But out of that doubt of the visible fact of death rose most of the things that have made Europe even to-day a habitable continent —Greek tragedy, the prose of Plato, the paintings of the Florentines, Rome and the great cathedrals, and the courtesy of chivalrous men. Here, at least, a meaning was seen in life other than its obvious meaning, and this is surely the beginning—or one of the beginnings —of wisdom. To accept the obvious meaning of life is the natural inclination of every man who has a living to make, and we to-day who read so many newspapers and who travel in trains above the ground and under the ground, and for whom the world is little more than a menagerie of machines, are perhaps even more easily tempted into this attitude of mind than was the savage of ten thousand years ago as he lamented in his blindness over the barren world of winter as over a grave.

Which of us, indeed, is not constantly tempted into believing that the things about him are real? The very buildings in the streets along which we walk seem real—horribly real. I do not suggest that, if we saw through clearer eyes, the buildings would not be there. But they would not be solidly, permanently there. We should see them as a temporarily hard compost of dust returning to dust and doomed to be carried at last to the four quarters of the

world on the winds of Heaven. How greatly it would add to the cheerfulness of life in London if, as we pass through strait after strait of its high buildings, we realized that all these shops and insurance offices and hotels and theatres—nay, the very taverns—are but an eruption for a time on a green field, and that the green field will be there when they are gone! They may outlast us, but they must yield to time: they are crumbling, atom by atom, at this very hour. Unhappily, it is not only the shops and hotels and theatres that are falling into dust. St. Paul's and the little whitened churches in the Strand are flowing out of sight in the great river of dust even while we are looking at them. Genius may survive incompetence for a thousand years or longer, but genius, too, passes or its works pass. At the same time, when we look at the great works of mankind, it is difficult to believe that any genius ever entirely perishes. Even the form in which it embodies itself seems proof against utter ruin, and the battery neither of outrage nor of oblivion can lay it beyond recognition among the things that are as though they had never been. Think how those noseless, headless, armless, legless statues of the Greeks, mutilated by neglect and time and every other injury, still survive in indestructible beauty, so that the men and women we know seem doomed and insignificant compared with them. The Parthenon, too, has survived, though in ruins, and we almost persuade ourselves that its walls must inevitably stand till the soul or genius of the building has found other walls as noble in which to make its home. The literature of

antiquity has come down to us in corrupt and haphazard manuscripts: pages, but not the genius, have disappeared. Genius, indeed, seems to be in its very nature something imperishable, so that it is almost impossible to believe that the work of any great author has been lost for ever. There may have been mute, inglorious Miltons, but there was only one Milton who could write, and him we have with us. Genius, even when it takes no steps to preserve itself for future generations, survives as necessarily as the spring returns. It has for centuries been a subject of wonder that the greatest and most real figures in the Christian and the pagan world, Jesus and Socrates, should never have written a book but should have trusted to the most impermanent of all things in the arts, the human voice, and yet should have survived in their very phrases and gestures as few laborious and self-conscious artists have survived. Socrates, it may be said, had at least a great artist to immortalize him—an artist who would himself have been immortal even if Socrates had never lived. But the writers of the Gospels were not great artists who would in any age or in any place have written immortal literature. It is as though they had been chosen almost at random to be messengers of a genius not their own. They became artists only because a genius without parallel was using them as its channels.

Thus there may be some reality—some permanent reality—in the world about us. For where there is genius there is reality. But it is only in a small part of our lives that we are even interested in genius. The real thing

for us is the unreal thing of the moment—the bus on which we are riding, the office to which we are going, the dress-tie that has gone crooked, the fox-trot that is stumbling in our ears, the bad wine we have given a friend, the misbehaviour of the French, the newest play and the newest player, the overdraft at the bank, and all the round of work, amusement and appetite. I have heard a British general apologizing like a schoolboy to his host because he had come to dinner in tails and a white tie when every other man was wearing a black tie and a dinner-jacket. It is well for us to be reminded now and then, even if we have to go to church for it, that all these things are unreal and belong to a three-dimensional world which, though it may be a manifestation of reality, may well be as unsubstantial as a shadow, or may even indeed be invisible, to eyes that are accustomed to a world of more heavenly measurements.

But these dimensions are beyond me, and I write about them only because it is in the fashion of the hour. If they attract me, it is because they cast a doubt on the reality of a paved and trampled world that is far more real to me than I like. It is so real to me, indeed, that, if I talk of life and the return of life from the grave and immortality, it is half the time only a play of the fancy, like a toy searchlight turned on the distant and impermeable heavens. . . . Had I not looked out of the window at St. Paul's the other day, and seen how unreal and impermanent all the world of chimneys and ugliness around it seemed in comparison, I might not have written of these matters.

## XX. On Never Going to the British Museum

HOW enthusiastic the natural man is over museums and art galleries! Something in me responds as I read in a leading article in "The Times" that "there is no reason why almost any Londoner should not, if the museums and galleries were always open for nothing, be able to constitute himself a connoisseur of beauty." Not for me, I know, to constitute myself a connoisseur of beauty after this fashion, but even I, who seldom enter a museum or art gallery except during a visit to a foreign town, have dreamed of spending long days in public buildings, from the walls of which the world's genius looked down on me, a trembling initiate, or in which the world's knowledge was preserved in glass cases to be passed on to me as an almost private possession. Before I came to London I thought of it chiefly as a city of theatres, concert halls, and museums and galleries of the arts. I imagined that any sane Londoner, outside his working hours, would be either listening to music or looking at pictures on such occasions as he was not reading a book or seeing a play. It is odd what a hunger for the arts one had at that age, as though perpetually hoping to discover in a book or a picture the keys of Heaven. The very names of certain authors and artists made one vibrate

with a sense of impending revelation, even if one had never read or seen a line of their work. I remember my excitement on first hearing the name of Walter Savage Landor, and how I went out with the first shillings I had and bought his verse in the Canterbury Poets and his prose in the Camelot Classics and all but persuaded myself for months, though with more and more difficulty, that here were the keys, or were going to be the keys, at last. Then there was Schubert. Then there was Wagner. One went to one's first Wagner opera in the sure and certain hope that a new door would be opened, and lo! doors vaster even than one had dreamed swung wide on their hinges. Those were days in which it was possible to go to the opera twice in a day and not feel weary—to sit through "Mignon" in the afternoon and to go to "Lohengrin" in the evening. If London seemed desirable then, it was chiefly as a city in which the opera lasted, not for a week only, but for a season. Had it been foretold me that a time would come when "The Ring" would be produced in London and when I, though a Londoner by settlement, would remain away from it, not merely with cheerfulness, but almost with a feeling of relief, I should have laughed at the falsehood. But "The Ring" has been produced in London more than once since then, and I have not heard it yet. I doubt if I shall ever hear it. I no longer expect to find the keys just there. I do not even buy Wagner rolls for the piano-player. Yet I would once have sworn that Wagner was greater than St. Paul or Robert Louis Stevenson.

# Never Going to the British Museum

As for the museums and picture galleries, how great was their lure three hundred miles away! The picture galleries, perhaps, were less exciting in prospect than the concert rooms, and the British Museum than the picture galleries. But, as at least half of my friends were painters, I had an ardent enough faith in Turner and Rembrandt and Velasquez to believe that they were the possessors of the keys if I could but find them. I had always felt a foreigner and an ignoramus in the presence of pictures, enjoying them rather as one enjoys a strange town in which a language is being spoken that one does not understand, but I had no doubt that I had only to become familiar with them in order to be as powerfully affected by them as I was by music. The British Museum, too, would disclose to me the secrets of Greece, where there was beauty not only in the faces of men and women but in their words—nay (which is most difficult of all), in their very actions. More than this, the reading-room was there to convert me into a scholar, if I wished, with shelves of learning that Faust might have envied. To go to London, indeed, was to go on a pilgrimage to a city which was a vast storehouse of beauty and wisdom that were to be had almost for the asking. It may seem all the more unaccountable that, on arriving in London, a lonely loafer in a lonely attic in Pimlico, I immediately went out and bought a map of the town and spent my first evening in a seat in the gallery of the old Gaiety Theatre. Had you been as deeply in love with Miss Marie Studholme as I was in my 'teens, I do not think you would have regarded this as too base a

declension from the ideal. Love transforms even "The Toreador" into something more charming and desirable than the lost plays of Menander. The next day a man whom I had known as a medical student and who was acting as *locum tenens* somewhere in the East End called on me, and, after showing me the house where the Baroness Burdett-Coutts lived (which everybody, for some strange reason, used to show me) and the house where the Duke of Devonshire lived, and Buckingham Palace and St. James's Palace and Mooney's, took me off later in the day to Whitechapel, where, after a dish of tripe, we spent the evening getting into the way of actors and actresses behind the scenes at the Christmas pantomime. I confess I should have preferred to buy a seat, and I should have preferred still more not to see the pantomime at all, but I was in the hands of fate, which seemed to be bearing me further and further away from Schubert and G. F. Watts—how we worshipped him in those days! —and Phidias. Next to call on me was a painter whom I had known since we were small boys. He took me out and put me on to the top of a horse-bus, pointed out the house where the Baroness Burdett-Coutts lived and the house where the Duke of Devonshire lived, and ultimately led me into a public-house in Fleet Street, explaining as we went in: "Old Johnson used to come here." Well, an association with Dr. Johnson was at least ennobling, but this was not the reading-room of the British Museum. Then my friend took me out to Hampstead and into an inn, afterwards famous in song as the Old Bull and

Bush, explaining after the fashion of a man of letters, "Old Hazlitt used to come here." That night I spent with him at Hampstead. On the next afternoon he proposed that we should go to Battersea on a visit to the studio of another artist whose name has become a household word since then. When we reached the Pier Hotel at Albert Bridge, he said, "Let's go in here," and, as we waited to be served, he speculated on the possibility that "old Whistler used to come here" when he was painting his "Battersea Bridge." Never before had I lived in such a whirl of literary and artistic associations. I might not be seeing many pictures or reading many books, but I was following in the footsteps of the great painters and the great writers with an almost dog-like fidelity. My friend was a perfect master of the literary geography of London, though, indeed, when he led me into a most unpromising-looking tavern in St. Martin's Lane on the plea that "old Stevenson used to come here," I began to suspect that he was playing on my credulity. Still, there were pauses between the lessons, during which we did visit the Turner rooms in the National Gallery and gaze at "Rain, Steam and Speed" as at one of the wonders of the world in ruins. My friend's chief method of expressing his enthusiasm, as he stood before a picture he liked, was to say merely, "By God, old chap!" or "By God, Willie!" or "By God, Rupert!" and to nod his head, as if in despair of ever rivalling so great a miracle. And so he spoke before the blue cloak of the Mother of God in a Titian, or before the ox and the ass and the

divine nursery under a hill of roads winding among cypresses in a Fra Lippo Lippi, or before a base king portrayed by Velasquez or before Rembrandt portrayed by himself. And, indeed, if we idled a good deal of our time in other places, he talked by preference even there of writers and artists—of Hazlitt and Lamb and Sir Thomas Browne, of Turner and Corot and Millet, and above all of Wordsworth, whom he revered as a poet but detested as a man. I cannot, by an odd chance, remember his ever once saying, "Old Wordsworth used to come here."

Thus my pilgrimage to London was, as it were, defeated at the very outset. And even to-day I have heard little of that music and seen few of those pictures and read few of those books that were once like the stars circling round the star of guidance in a dark world. I seldom hear any good music except such as I play with my own feet. I do not go to one opera in a year. I have been once in the Tate Gallery since the war, and not even once in the National Gallery. I have been in the British Museum, but only in order to see a civil servant. I am always on the point of breaking through this indolence and taking up the pilgrimage at the point at which I dropped out of it so many years ago, but, when it comes to the practical issue whether I shall go to a picture gallery or go home, I invariably find myself mounting a bus and going home. Theoretically, I still haunt museums and galleries and concert halls. If they were closed I should feel an infinitely poorer man, as though my income of possible pleasures had been cut

down. I love the National Gallery and the British Museum, indeed, as noble reserves of pleasure on which I can draw at need. I can bear not visiting them, but I could not bear so easily not having them to visit.

Hence I join ardently in every protest against closing a museum or charging for admission to it. I do not like the potential I who visits such places to be hampered. It is not that I myself mind paying sixpence, but the potential I (who, as I have said, frequents museums much more than I do) might not have a sixpence. And, after all, the museums and art galleries exist for potential visitors as well as for actual visitors. They are a part of the rich surroundings of our lives. They make London almost worth living in, whereas without them it would be a wilderness. I like to feel that somewhere or other in the neighbourhood troops of people are shuffling round high rooms, peering at pictures and staring at statues and paying a puzzled reverence to antiquity. They are our representatives in the public appreciation of the arts just as the people who attend political meetings are our representatives in keeping alive the flame of democratic government. Do not think that one enjoys a picture or a statue the less for never having seen it. The "Mona Lisa" never seemed so wonderful as before one had been to Paris, and the "Winged Victory" would have been as lovely as winds and waters in the imagination even though one had never been to the Louvre or seen so much as a photograph of it. There is a pleasure in knowing that a thing exists in the same world with us. There is another pleasure in knowing

that a thing exists in the same neighbourhood with us. London does not mean to me merely the people and the plane-trees I see from the top of the bus on my way to the office, or the pavements and policemen, the lamps and the loiterers, I see out of the window of a taxi on my way to dinner. It means all the great composers constantly coming to life again in concert halls and theatres, all the great painters surviving in the quiet paradise of the National Gallery, all the great sculptors and all the great authors, a majestic congregation in the British Museum. Why, it is a pleasure, when walking along Adelphi Terrace, to feel " Bernard Shaw lives there," even though he is not to be seen at the window. It is a pleasure, too, to enjoy the art of the day by proximity and to know that somewhere or other the pictures of Mr. Augustus John and Mr. Henry Lamb and Mr. Nevinson are being exhibited, though the show is usually over before one has had time to go to it. And it is a pleasure to be contemporary with Mr. Arnold Bax and Mr. Arthur Bliss and to live in a constant anticipation of hearing their work otherwise than through one's admirable representative, the regular concert goer. The pleasures of proximity have never yet had justice done to them. It is chiefly they, however, that make London so much more desirable a city to live in than Birmingham or Manchester. It is because they mean so much to us that, if the British Museum or National Gallery were burnt down, we should regard it not only as a public calamity but as one of the great personal calamities of our lives.

## XXI. Thoughts on Restaurants

IF you ride down Piccadilly on the top of a bus, there comes a point at which you will pass, as through a strait between two high cliffs, under the shadow of two noble restaurants. The Ritz is on one side and the Berkeley on the other, and, if you never have been in them, you must vastly admire them. It is not that anything in their architecture sends your thoughts flying to the Parthenon, or that the people you see coming out of their doors are invariably beautiful or even good. It is merely that an unvisited restaurant of the more luxurious kind is extraordinarily fascinating to the imagination. I am still simple enough to believe that somewhere on earth there must be a restaurant that is a paradise of food and good company. I could not describe the courses I should like to find there; but, if you can imagine tiny fishes brought from the extremest seas, and soup made from birds' nests that little brown men had climbed for at peril of their lives, and the flesh of birds and beasts that had preserved in their flavour something of the wild beauty of the forest and at the same time were on the palate delicate and urbane, and fruits that had been grown in the orchards of an Eastern tyrant and were of the seven beautiful colours not yet known to man. . . .

The question how far the digestion should be humoured in the preparation of a really luxurious dinner is not easy to decide off-hand. There are undoubtedly many excellent dishes that are digestible. It would be mere perversity to quarrel with these because there are no ill-effects from eating them. At the same time, I think they should be set off with other dishes of a braver kind in such a way that the general tendency of the meal would be towards indigestion. There are times when the liver should not only not be considered but positively flouted. Have you ever visited one of those pale restaurants where men and women who think of their digestions congregate, and have you ever found in them any of that gaiety that is so often the accompaniment of a ruined complexion and a ruined stomach? Man might as well be a pig and eat from a trough as gorge himself on some of those vegetables, of which the very names are an offence. By some strange twist of language it is those of us who believe that there ought to be as many courses in a good dinner as there are counties in Wales that are often accounted pigs. Let those who have lived in the country and seen pigs at their food say whether they have ever known a pig that would not have been perfectly content with a diet of milk and porridge. I do not know if pigs suffer from indigestion. I am not sure that it is not his capacity for indigestion that sets man apart from all the other animals. A troubled stomach is the beginning of a troubled conscience, and without it man might never have discovered his moral nature but have remained as the beasts. Even his first dreams, which were the

source of his imaginative life, may well have resulted from eating dishes that no beast would have eaten. . . .

It may be that I am thus particular about what I shall eat because, not only have I never had a meal at the Ritz or the Berkeley, but because I have never been across the threshold of any of what I call the really great restaurants. Fate has played me a scurvy trick on every occasion on which it seemed that, at last, a new world of eating was about to be opened up to me. I had to stay away from the only dinner to which I was ever invited at Claridge's because at the last moment I was ordered out of town on a special piece of work. A man once invited me to lunch at the Savoy, but, when we met near Charing Cross, he said: "Look here, why not go to Gatti's? It's nearer, and we can talk better." Good heavens, as though I wanted to talk! If you can imagine a child bravely smiling, while the tears of disappointment glisten into its eyes as it is given half a crown instead of being allowed to go to a party to which it has been looking forward in its dreams, you will have some notion of the mood in which on that dark day I sat down to salmon and cucumber in Gatti's. My third disappointment occurred when an American invited me to dine with his wife and himself at the Carlton. There was, I think, some illness at home at the time, and I had to telephone to the Americans to come out and dine with me instead. I have never been invited to the Carlton since. I doubt if I ever shall be. I seem doomed to be unable to find any of the exits out of my present state of

existence into luxury. If I find a door with "Exit" written above it, it is invariably shut —slammed, as it were, in my face. On one occasion I did penetrate into the outer hall of one of the good restaurants just under the rank of the Carlton. I had been invited to luncheon, but, fate once more stepping in, either my hostess or I made a mistake about the hour, and I arrived half an hour too soon. I sat in an arm-chair for a quarter of an hour, and, as time passed, I began to wonder whether the invitation might not have been for some other day. At the end of twenty minutes I decided that this must be so, and said to myself, "Well, I may as well have lunch, anyhow," and rose to go into the dining-room. Before I had reached a table, however, I suddenly remembered that I had only four-and-sixpence in my pocket. There was nothing for it but to make for the door, and, having recovered my coat and hat from the attendant, to creep out with as little display of emotion as possible and lunch on poached eggs and coffee in an A.B.C. tea-shop. It did not make my loss seem lighter when I learned afterwards that my hostess arrived three minutes after I had gone. I am sure those poached eggs were as good eggs as ever were laid, but I confess I have never been able to think of poached eggs since without repulsion.

It is difficult to believe that anyone else has ever experienced the sufferings of Tantalus in regard to meals at the best restaurants on the same scale that I have. I do not think restaurants mean so much to other people as they mean to me. Possibly I began to dream of

the ideal restaurant many years ago when I was living on less money than a match-seller, and when the four steps of luxurious living were the restaurant where a mug of tea cost a penny, the restaurant where a pot of tea cost three-halfpence, the restaurant where a pot cost twopence, and the restaurant where a pot cost threepence. What I liked most about these unpretentious restaurants was that, if you ordered a pot of tea, you had a guarantee printed up that it was "newly made for each customer." No West-End tea-shop that I know offers its customers any such guarantee to-day. But, indeed, on the whole, the food in some of those cheap eating-houses was not intolerable, if you cared for sausages. I used to like to see them frying in the window, and I do not know where I have eaten a heartier meal than at the restaurant known as "Ye Golden Pigge" (now pulled down) in the Strand, at which "two sausages and mashed" could be had for sixpence-halfpenny. I remember meeting an old fellow-student from my native town outside it one day about lunch time. I urged him to come in with me, and told him: "You can get quite a cheap meal in here." "I know I could," he said, looking with disgust at the pans of sausages and at the cook digging an iron spoon into the fried onions, "but I couldn't eat it." And he went off by himself to a restaurant where his luncheon must have cost him a shilling or more, having arranged to meet me outside half an hour later. The only economy I never remember practising in the matter of eating and drinking was to frequent the four-ale bar. I have never tasted

four-ale in my life, mainly, I fancy, from thoughtlessness. I have been in a four-ale bar more than once, but only to drink a glass of rum and milk at five o'clock in the morning after I had been walking like a waif about the streets all night. Thus I have no unsatisfied ambitions in regard to public-houses as I have in regard to restaurants. Liquid food was cheap in those days, and a man with a shilling in his pocket could safely visit even the long bar of the Criterion or "Jimmy's." Not that a wise man would visit them save once or twice from curiosity. His shilling would go further at the "Bird in Hand" or the "White Swan."

Here, then, is an attempt to trace my dream of a miraculous restaurant back to its source. It is obviously due to a repression—to some suppressed wish that disturbed me as I helped myself to salt with the end of my knife in some Good Pull-up for Carmen. Now that I have admitted my secret, it may be that the sense of frustration will leave me, and that I shall be able to pass between the Berkeley and the Ritz without murmuring against the fate that has never admitted me through their portals. You may think that, in the circumstances, you yourself would go into one of them and have a meal, merely to satisfy your curiosity. But that would spoil everything, besides being expensive. I prefer to leave these matters to destiny. If I am meant to lunch with the rich, I shall lunch with the rich. If not—why, there is very good company at Groom's.

## XXII. The Nightingale Arrives

IT is against reason, perhaps, to go out to hear the nightingale on a day of hail, sleet, and lightning, but any excuse is valid if it takes you to Abinger Hammer.

On Saturday, the nightingale and I alike defied reason, and, when I went to bed after midnight, I could hear him through the bedroom window "pheu-pheu-pheuing" in the Gomshall marshes.

He was still singing when I fell asleep about two o'clock.

There was an American ornithologist who came to England some time ago expressly in order to hear a nightingale, and, if I remember right, he had some difficulty in finding one. As a matter of fact, there are few birds to which it should be so easy to direct a stranger.

On Saturday I not only took a man to the very copse, but set him down under a hedge in the sleet and the wind beside the very tree—a young ash—where a nightingale was likely to sing. And a nightingale did sing. It would be fairly easy, I imagine, for the Government to prepare a nightingale map of England, which would be almost as accurate as an ordnance survey map.

Saturday chilled the cuckoo into all but silence, but the other birds sang by the calendar, not by the thermometer. The hazels creaked

in the wind; the silver birches were swept by it, like women driven before a sunny seaside gale; the beeches waved their arms in a continuous dance; every leaf on every tree seemed to be trembling in the shadow of another leaf. But no honest bird gave up its song.

No sooner did the shadow of storm pass, leaving a day of blue and white shining overhead, than the world became a garden of willow-wrens. The leaves are now so thick that one does not see so many birds as one hears, but in the park I seldom went fifty yards but a willow-wren was there with its song. It is one of the commonest of all the birds, and to my ear sings the sweetest of all songs, but the poets prefer to write about linnets. Heard close by, its little dance of music, which is the grace of young leaves expressing itself in song, is strangely touching, even in the very top of its joyousness.

In the gaps in the wood a whitethroat scrambling into the air above a bush and jerking out his song, made one think of a wooden toy trying to sing ecstatically. Nay, succeeding. For, if the whitethroat is not ecstatic, there is no ecstasy among birds. He belongs to a family, however, many members of which have to do their best with a creaking musical instrument. Has not the song of his cousin, the garden warbler, been compared to "the squeaking of a broken perambulator on a marble floor?"

Some birds, indeed, are like some gramophones in the queer noises they make as a preface to their music. But with what a sweet

and wild fortissimo the garden warbler, hidden among the silver birches, triumphed on Saturday over these harsh preliminaries!

Every bird, indeed, did his part as though he had an audience. The green woodpecker rose from the grass in a field between two woods and disappeared among the trees, out of which he sent back his mocking whinny. The great spotted woodpecker came and fluttered from oak to oak, crying, "Jack, Jack," as he hurried from the tip of one to the stem of another, nobly showing his crimson nape and his pied wing as he ran a few steps up the trunk.

The nuthatch, too, charming as a bird painted in Japan, came to its mud-guarded nesting-hole at the end of a rotten bough, and, hanging beneath it like a tit on a coco-nut, hoisted itself within, and left us in a colourless world. This it did in silence, but in another part of the wood another nuthatch ran up and down the branches of an oak tapping out its song like a telegram.

The nightingale, too, sang, or began to sing, to the right hand and to the left, wherever there were a few bushes and a tangle of briars. I do not pretend that he sang his best just after the hail shower. But, so long as we did not go into the deep woods, there were seldom ten minutes in the afternoon when we did not hear a great singer practising.

And, indeed, there was excuse even for a good song. Here a river of bluebells poured down a slope of oaks and firs. On the edge of the beeches was a misty lake of forget-me-nots. Near it was a lake of red campions. A wide

grassy path would be a lane of daisies that closed their eyes in the cold long before it was evening.

Hawthorn and elder and the first dogwood were in blossom, and every gorse-bush blazed as the sun ought to have blazed. The new leaves on the oaks were full of a golden light, and the new leaves on the beeches full of a clear green light.

It is true that, when the shadows came and the wind blew, it was as though winter had come whistling into spring. But, though the wind was too much for the butterflies, not a single one of which was to be seen, it was not too much for the birds ; and robin and wren, blackbird and chaffinch—who sings, it is said, " I haven't had a bit of bread and cheese since I've *been* here "—poured out the multitude of their songs as much as to say, " This is England, and all weathers are alike to us."

So we, too, assuming that it was spring, sat down on a sandy bank and listened to the nightingale.

Now, the nightingale, some say, is a plain bird. That I deny absolutely. There are riches of colour in the glowing brown of its wings, and in the glowing red-brown of its tail, and its white breast was made for moonlight.

Mr. Coward has called it a large robin, and it is infinitely more graceful than a robin. This nightingale had also something of the friendliness of a robin as, after a while, it left its singing perch and settled on the branch of a sapling a few yards away and surveyed us with gentle and inquisitive eyes. It turned its head to us and bobbed ; it turned its tail to us

and bobbed; it turned sideways to us and bobbed. And then, having shown itself off from every point of view, like a mannequin, it flew away.

But that did not distress us, as we had come out, less to hear it sing, than to discover where we should be likely to hear nightingales singing after nightfall.

On our way back to it through the woods after sunset, we were lucky enough to emerge out of the shadows into a field that was, for the moment, a playground of nightjars. Looking like black hawks in the last light of day, three of these noiseless winged monsters were pursuing their prey up and down the air, mewing like kittens. They would leap upwards after moths, like horses jumping over impossibly high fences. They would glide down the air like aeroplanes. They would rush hither and thither, beating the air with their narrow wings like swifts. They had the air of bird-ghosts recklessly engaged in eerie and silent "stunts." It is no wonder that this bird of many names —fern-owl, goat-sucker, moth-hawk, and gabble-ratchet—has quickened the fancy of the superstitious.

As we crossed the field the nightjars fled like demons into the hedges, and rabbits followed them, waving white flags behind them as they ran.

But, alas! when we reached the end of our journey, our nightingale was silent under the stars. The copse was dark and silent, save for a flash of lightning, and the occasional creak of a bough.

Luckily, the "pheu-pheu-pheu" of another

nightingale reached us from a little way off. There is no other piece of bird-music like it. The repetition of the same note dwelt on it as it is uttered and repeated with ever-increasing force as if played on a violin by a man of genius —is it any wonder that the poets have heard in it all the beauty of lamentation ?

Then the flute takes its place, and there is a pause, as if waiting for an answering bird. Then it is as if its whole frame were shaken with song, and notes pour out almost too tumultuous in their sweetness for so tiny a bosom.

As we stood in the darkness of the road the nightingale sang in a thicket of maple and elder a yard or two above our heads ; and, if we spoke, he would but give the dark bushes a louder voice.

It was much too cold to feel sentimental, and, no doubt, he was not singing his best, but the very idea of a nightingale singing delights most of us, and I was glad enough to keep the road till near midnight, and listen to him and then to his brother in the Gomshall marshes singing in solitude under the bramble sprays of the stars.

## XXIII. Enchantment in the Music Hall

MOST things become charming if they linger long enough in the memory. Do you remember the Strand before the improvements were made? Do you remember the water-chute and the fairy lamps at the Earl's Court Exhibition? Do you remember the old horse-bus and the old hansom-cab, and the old boiled beef eating-house near the corner of Fleet Street? How devulgarized they are by time! How they fall into their places in a pattern scarcely less quaint and delightful than that on a willow-pattern plate! They have lost the offence of novelty and have been subdued to loveliness by the mere procession of time. There is a fascination of contemporary things and men, but it does not touch the heart, as does time seen in retreat. Romance looks backward rather than at the disorder of the present or into the dark night of the future. Behind, everything is steeped in stillness, like a landscape in an old picture. It has passed out of the bustle of time and become a part of the quiet of eternity. Speak to anyone of the sweetmeats that both of you used to eat thirty or forty or anything up to ninety years ago, and you will see a brightening and a softening of the eye as each blessed name is called back from the edges of oblivion—stick-jaw, almond rock, liquorice laces, conversation

lozenges. And do you remember the little oval boxes of sherbet, each with a little tin spoon inside? If I ever found a club, I shall call it the Ancient Order of Sherbet-eaters. If I were the editor of a daily paper, I should send out reporters to interview old men and women about the sweets they liked best when they were children. How much more human historians might make their pages if, when they write about the Crimean War, they would tell us whether at that date children had yet begun to eat coco-nut chips or whether they preferred those strange balls which became in turn red and yellow and blue and violet in the mouth of the sucker! Alas, every sweet almost is dateless and anonymous. They should be signed like books, so that we might honour their makers. And so should biscuits—at least, animal biscuits and letter biscuits. Is not the man who first made animal biscuits more to us than the man who built the Pyramids? Yet great scholars will devote a lifetime to discovering a single fact about the one, while neglecting the other as a nobody beneath notice. A writer of genius who died recently once said that sponge fingers were the things she remembered loving longest. Turn back your thoughts down the happy valleys of appetite, and you, too, will see many wonderful things on plates and in silver baskets—castles with sugar tops, shortbread, snowballs, slim cakes—oh, a perfect magic of food that you will look for in vain in the dull world of to-day. The older one grows, the more firmly persuaded one becomes that civilization reached its highest point during one's childhood. How they used

to be able to cook in those days ! How to bake ! What shops they had !

But the enchantment of memory lights up more than our childhood. It lights up our teens and our twenties. It may even in the course of time light up our middle age. How strong it is you may see if you go to the Palladium and look at the middle-aged and older men who have come to re-sing the songs of their youth with the help of a number of retired music-hall artists who have returned to the stage for a brief moment as the " Veterans of Variety." Nothing is more certain than that the people who used to go to the Tivoli in the " old days " and sit with a drink before them while Marie Lloyd sang or R. G. Knowles talked the swiftest patter on earth are unanimously agreed that the music-hall is not what it used to be. The music-hall of those days still bore traces of its origin as a public-house sing-song, and men went to it in a more easy-going mood than if they were going to a theatre or a concert. The performance was an accompaniment to tobacco and alcohol, and there was a happy inconsecutiveness about it that did not weary the attention. It was an atmosphere, I think, more favourable to genius—at least, to genius of one particular kind—than the atmosphere of the modern music-hall. Stars were plentiful, and good songs succeeded each other as fast as sheep jumping through a gap. The performers of those days are kings and queens of their profession in the memory—Marie Lloyd, Lottie Collins, Albert Chevalier, Dan Leno, Eugene Stratton, Gus Elen, Charles Coborn, Little Tich, Vesta Victoria, Vesta Tilley and

Chirgwin the White-eyed Kaffir. Their songs are the only poetry that many of us remember. I myself know scarcely twenty lines of Shelley or Wordsworth by heart, and only one of the psalms of David, but my head is full of such lines as Eugene Stratton's :

> My gal, she's a high-born lady.
> She's black, but not too shady—
> Feathered like a peacock, just as gay,
> She's not coloured, she was born dat way.
> I love my coal-black Venus,
> No coon can come between us ;
> They know she belongs to me,
> Dat big black gal ob mine.

I will not swear to the accuracy of every word of this, but I wish I could remember as many lines of "Epipsychidion" with no more blunders. It may be that folly is more easily remembered than wisdom : otherwise, how does it come about that I cannot remember the first book of the "Paradise Lost" which I have read many times, while, though I only heard it once, and that more than twenty years ago, I can still repeat the chorus of the music-hall song :

> Let your whiskers grow, let your whiskers grow,
> Don't waste your time in shaving ;
> Tear them out by the roots,
> They'll make laces for your boots,
> And look at the money you'll be saving !

Freud, I understand, maintains that, if we forget a thing, it is probably because we subconsciously wish to forget it ; and it may be that my subconsciousness dwells more affectionately on

> Is your mammy always with yer,
> Susie, Susie Anne ?

and on

> So we sent them down to Liza,
> With a gentle message not to send them back,

than on the sonnets of Shakespeare or the "Ode on Intimations of Immortality Received in Childhood." The former are the sort of literature the subconsciousness would enjoy; for the subconsciousness has peculiar tastes. However this may be, I do not think I am exceptional in having a subconsciousness that sings itself to sleep with tags of old music-hall songs. It is not that we thought all those old songs good even at the time. I protest that I was never taken in by

> Baby's eyes are Irish,
> Baby's eyes are blue,
> Baby's eyes are like her Dad's,
> For they were Irish, too.
> But Daddy's gone and left us
> To dwell in Paradise,
> And Mammy sits and sees him still
> In Baby's Irish eyes.

Moving though this is—and moving as is the waltz-tune to which it was sung—it always seemed to me to verge on the sentimental, and to require an excessive amount of beer in order to produce its full effect on the auditor.

It is a remarkable fact that the world publicly forgets a music-hall song in a few months, while privately it goes on remembering it for a generation or more. No one dare sing in public—or has dared for many years—"Daisy Bell" or "The Man who Broke the Bank at Monte Carlo." But what survivor from the Victorian age can ever be quit of them in the

private chambers of his memory? It is an extraordinary paradox that the most perishable of all songs are the songs that never perish out of our minds. We abandon them, and do all that men can do in order to forget them, but "I Owe Ten Dollars to O'Grady" survives in some cell of the brain as surely as "Full Fathom Five," and "Ta-ra-ra-boom-de-ay" haunts us as though it were a poem of the order of "The Cloud" or "The Skylark."

That a great many men would be glad to be reminded in public of the things they remember only in private was the rather bright notion that occurred to the management of the Palladium; and the size and the shouts of the audiences that have filled the house have proved once more that human beings love above all things to look back. The show is not in itself a very good one: it has to be seen in retrospect in order to seem better than middling; but, as the house is filled with the male counterparts of Lot's wife, there is a cheerfulness and tearfulness of reunion in the air through the mists of which the performers loom large as they do in memory. Such reunion produces in us a glow like the glow of virtue. Even the return of the prodigal son was the cause of a party at which all the charities were present. How much more welcome than a prodigal son is so incomparable a mimic and master of back-chat as Mr. Arthur Roberts or so masculine a sentimentalist about the old home as Mr. Leo Dryden! To see them again is to return into the world of Gladstone and Liddon, of all the great prophets and preachers and painters who made the world glorious in the latter half of

last century; for, indeed, the Tivoli was in its way as representative of the Victorian age as was the Royal Academy or the House of Commons. It was, I fancy, more generally liked than either. How many Academy pictures made their way into Saturday night hearts as did Leo Dryden's song, "The Miner's Dream"?

Ah! we were not ashamed to weep thirty years ago! And, by heaven! we could laugh, too! How many songs can we not remember about men coming home drunk and being hit over the head with a poker by their indignant wives! Some people talk as though we could see nothing funny in anything but mothers-in-law and twins. It is a gross libel on a great age. All life was our theme, and there was scarcely a subject outside the established religion that we could not decorate with a red nose and a step dance. For men knew how to dance in those days. The man who sang "The Night I Found the Five-Pound Note" broke into a dance as did the lady who sang "I Went to Paris with Papa"; and, no doubt, if anybody had sung "Home, Sweet Home," he would have danced, too.

And now all this has taken its place in the procession of the past, with Ulysses and his rowers, and Antony and Cleopatra, and Napoleon, and Joanna Southcott, and the ladies of old time about whom Villon wrote the ballad. And already men can enjoy "At Trinity Church I Met my Doom" almost as though it were some curiosity unburied in Egypt after thousands of years. I wish I could feel as sentimental about it as I ought, but I am afraid I feel cold, detached, as I hear

once again songs that should be heard only in the memory, and that might still seem merry or moving there. But it was a music-hall song that warned us :

> We're all growing older, older every day,
> Older and older, so the people say ;
> Some are growing uglier and some are growing grey,
> But we're all growing older every day.

Alas ! I cannot become young again merely by attending a revival of the old-fashioned music-hall. I can become young again only if I revisit those old galleries in retrospect and reverie.

## XXIV. The Watchers

GRAVE social philosophers have always been suspicious of games. Games, when they are taken seriously, we are told, are a symptom, if not a cause, of the decay of society. One may say in regard to this that, if civilizations must die, they could not at least choose a more charming setting for the closing scene than a playing field. How delightful is England in June and July when the sun shines, and there is more tennis and cricket and racing and rowing and polo in a few weeks than most of us would have leisure to attend in a lifetime! There are those who tell us that we should stay at home and play games in the back garden with our friends instead of being content to look on at these public contests of men, women and horses. They even assure us that they prefer to watch the easy-going tennis that is played on a suburban lawn. There is something to be said for this view. I myself am happier in a garden than as a spectator at Wimbledon. But it is a different kind of happiness. In a garden I am a happy idler: if I go to Wimbledon, I find myself plunging into the energetic passions of a spectator. People sometimes talk as though the spectators at public games were mere lazy onlookers. They contrast the activity of the players with the inactivity of the crowd. I believe this to

be a fallacy. I am sure that to look on at a well-fought game is to take a sort of exercise and almost to play a part in the game itself. It is as if one's very muscles tightened at the exciting moments, and one's heart beats as fast as though one were running oneself. If an experimental psychologist were to go to Wimbledon with one of those machines for measuring the expenditure of effort, and were to carry out a series of tests among the spectators, I feel confident that he would discover that, even while sitting in their seats, they were expending as many foot-pounds of effort as, say, a builder. It is an arguable paradox that one can get more exercise from watching Johnston or Norton playing tennis than from playing tennis oneself. It is probably not quite true, but there is enough truth in it to make it worth maintaining in an argument. Many people are incapable of entering with the same keenness into the games which they play themselves as into the games which they see played by champions. They feel that something of world importance depends on the result of the latter, and grow as excited about them as though a game were a sort of beautiful war. Has one ever been more excited over anything in the public affairs of the world than over the doubt whether one's school would win the football cup? As one watched the match, one took part in it with all one's sinews, butting back the enemy in every scrummage, racing with the fast three-quarters through hostile hands that he slipped through as through the ineffectual hands of ghosts, kicking the ball high and far with the fearless full back, throwing the ball

out of touch deftly and powerfully with the half (or, as we used to call him, the quarter). No player moved but one's muscles moved with him. One's entire frame responded to and repeated all the activities of the field. All drama, I fancy, re-enacts itself in this way in the spectator's being, and, if the effect of this is good, as Aristotle says it is, in the theatre, I do not see why it should not also be good, though on another plane, in the grand stand of the playing-field. It is true that I cannot definitely say I have ever known a man whose biceps was well developed as a result of watching cricket or who got an athlete's heart from looking on at rugby football. But I like to think that there are such people, and that somewhere on earth is a man who, every season, after watching his first football match, has to go home and rub himself all over with Elliman's embrocation.

The spectator in any case is not the base person he is sometimes represented to be by those who accuse him of being responsible for the decadence of Greece and the fall of Rome. He is, on the contrary, a man of primitive tastes who likes, above all things, to see some kind of a fight. He knows that most of the animals, and men among them, become exceptionally and even excellingly interesting when they are fighting. A pair of farmyard cockerels that have never attracted his eye for so much as a passing moment begin to fight—and immediately he pauses and takes a lively interest in them. He sees a rook and a hawk quarrelling in the air, each attempting to mount above the other in order to deliver its blow, and his heart

beats faster as he awaits the issue of the fight. It is not that he is not glad that cock-fighting as a sport has been put down by the police. He may possibly be a humanitarian who detests all attempts to make a game out of the pugnacities of animals. But when Nature herself provides the sport, he is not so churlish as to refuse the boon. If it were possible to interfere between the hawk and the rook, I should interfere. I think I should put a stop to almost any fight except a prize fight, if I had the power. Even so, as the old dramatist said, *homo sum*, and, if it is only a pair of dogs that are fighting, I cannot pass by, like the Levite, on the other side. We may hate contests of this kind, but we cannot remain indifferent to them. A contest in itself is almost always an absorbing spectacle, and it is only odious in so far as some element of cruelty or brutality enters into it. Games, better than anything else, provide us with contests from which we need not shrink out of kindness of heart. Here are bloodless battles—dog-fights out of which both the dogs emerge exhausted but cheerful. Here is all the keenness of rivalry without its corollary of murderous malevolence. Man, it appears, can understand nothing save by comparison ; he can understand strength only by comparing one man's strength with another's, and speed only by comparing one horse's speed with another's. Hence his passionate interest in every sort of game in which strong men are pitted against each other, or any fine physical quality is seen in its relative perfection. Nor is it only in the physical world that we are in love with contest. Time

was when Christian men stood enthralled by the spectacle of one theologian striving for pre-eminence over another. A man who could dispute well in those days became famous throughout Europe, and Milton in his time was scarcely less famous than Jack Dempsey is in ours. And what is history, when it is not a record of contests between soldiers, but a record of contests between politicians? Go back to Athens, and you will always find the great politician confronting his rival, like a great boxer or a great tennis-player: every Demosthenes has his Æschines. As we read history, it reveals itself as an account of ten thousand championships won and lost. Contest is always there—either a contest between rival men, or a contest between rival nations. We like the great men to come before us in couples, and in our minds we can scarcely see them alone —Pitt without Fox, Gladstone without Disraeli. A public man's biography is largely the biography of his chief enemy. Here he seems to have lived most keenly, where he had to struggle most desperately for victory. Here, out of the overflow of his keenness, some keenness seems to pour into our own beings as we read, and our sleepy attention is awakened as though by a struggle of our own times. No doubt there are other important things in life besides conflict, but there are not many other things so inevitably interesting. The very saints interest us most when we think of them as engaged in a conflict with the Devil. And, indeed, men have gone so far as to imagine the entire universe as the scene of a long fight between Satan and God Almighty.

Thus it will be seen that even our excitement over the result of a ping-pong tournament has its roots in something deep and universal in our nature. If there is anything that especially distinguishes us from the angels, it is, I fancy, that the contest of opposites means so much more to us than it does to them. We imagine the very light and darkness fighting each other, and the gambler pits the red against the black. Games and sports are the finest animal expression of this love of opposites. So strong is our passion for such things that society is willing to support a large company of athletes in what would once have been called idleness in order that they may train themselves to such a point of perfection that our contests shall be contests between demigods. The all-time athlete does not seem a more shocking phenomenon to us than the all-time soldier. During peace-time, indeed, he looms a far larger figure in our interests than the soldier. His sham fights do not excite us the less because they are comparatively safe. All we ask is that he shall thrill us by standing up to his equals and surmounting all the difficulties in the path to victory. For games would cease to be exciting if men and horses did not meet men and horses who were more or less their equals. Boxing would lose its interest if the champion were always invincible. If our excitement over the Dempsey-Carpentier fight rose, as the papers said, to fever heat, it was because the genius of the one man seemed in its way equal to the genius of the other. If Mlle. Lenglen lived for ever, we should lose a great deal of our interest in women's tennis. Tennis, as played by her,

is an exhibition of skill and not a contest, and, as a result, we find a part of the crowd applauding her faulty strokes in the hope that, after all, she will prove herself human and may meet her equal at last instead of being an eagle among canaries. Similarly, racing would become comparatively dull if every year produced a Mumtaz Mahal, that marvellous two-year-old that can outstrip all its contemporaries as a northern gale could outstrip the puff of a child's breath. We admire Mlle. Lenglen and Mumtaz Mahal as wonders, but we are always hoping for the appearance of other wonders to match, if not to vanquish, them. Horse-racing is the sport of kings and dustmen because there are so few horses of whose continued supremacy we can be perfectly sure. Every season discovers horses that are whispered to be invincible —a Collaborator, a Verdict, a Town Guard— but in time they all go down and we enjoy racing all the better in consequence. What gives us the greatest pleasure on the race-course is a neck-and-neck finish—such as that between Happy Man and Silurian at Ascot—especially perhaps, if it is the horse we have backed that is a neck ahead. Horse-racing merely bores most of those who go to races, and who are not interested in advance in the contest between the genius of one horse and the genius of another. A boat-race similarly depends for most of its interest on our doubts and fears as to the result. How tedious was the Oxford and Cambridge race last year, with Cambridge certain to win, and winning without an effort! It was like watching a cricket match between Yorkshire and Glamorgan. As a spectacle of

white and green, even this may be worth looking at, but not as a contest. A seat at almost any game on a fine day is a lazy man's paradise. But the games that we remember with pleasure for years are those at which, so far from being lazy, we are lashed by the waves and beaten by the winds of excitement, and in which we take part in the strife as players by deputy.

## XXV. Things That Remain

THERE is a high path round the headland and, at the highest point of it, a little white house, or rather shelter, where two old men, their faces cross with looking out into the wind, wait through a considerable part of the year for the pilchards that never come. I am told that they have now been waiting sixteen years. Day by day, they gaze out over the blue tides, in search of the shadow on the water —or the ruffling, or the gleam, or whatever the scarcely perceptible sign may be that tells the wise that a million pilchards have swung in a horde into the sandy bay—and day by day they grow crosser, for the pilchards never come and the wind is cold. They hold no communications with passers-by, for what could they say but bitter things? They walk up and down on the path in their blue fishermen's clothes, figures of eternal disappointment, aloof from a world in which men who are willing to work and wait do not as a rule work and wait entirely in vain. Not that the old men have any real grievance. They are paid by a wealthy company which is ready to gamble on the fact that, if the pilchards do come, even once in ten years, there are fortunes to be made. But the old men do feel a grievance, like anybody else who is kept waiting too long. In the absence of pilchards, they are mere dots

in a seascape. Let the pilchards come, and they will be heroes of the hour and generals of events.

What was my surprise on approaching them yesterday, to see one of them grasp the other by the shoulder and point his arm out towards something in the sea, like a sailor in a picture. The other, his hands in his pockets and his jacket collar half turned up, jutted his chin out and wrinkled his face up excitedly, as though he were trying by sheer force to make his eyes see something that might not, after all, be there. After a few seconds, he gave a decisive nod, and the other old man ran, muttering, into the little white house. He came out almost immediately, carrying a dirty old trumpet about five feet long. Climbing up on a bank, he put the trumpet to his lips, and directing it towards the little harbour-town down in the bay, he blew such a sound into it as might have called a giant, not only out of his castle, but out of his grave. I used to think of the horn that hung at the gates of a giant's castle as an instrument with a brisk, gay, challenging note. Having heard the horn blown by the pilchard-watchers, I now understand why the giant was infuriated. I could not actually feel sure that the old man was blowing into the tube. He seemed to be yelling into it, like a man yelling "Murder!" or a man shouting for help in a nightmare. What I think really happened was that he blew till his cheeks cracked, and then he yelled till his vocal cords cracked, and then he blew again. It was almost impossible to believe that any sound could have been got out of such an

instrument merely by blowing. It was like something that had lain in the ground for two thousand years, and had been dug up on the site of Boadicea's last battle. On just such a tube did Boadicea's trumpeter blow as her chariot bumped over the ground into action. So I thought as I watched the old man howling into the mouthpiece—howling, apparently, in vain—while occasionally directing an anxious eye out towards the sign on the sea.

Meanwhile, the other old man had run into the little white house and brought out two other picturesque survivals known as "the bushes." The pilchard-watchers of Boadicea's day probably signalled to the town with real bushes. But even the present bushes, which are cased in white cloth, and waved by a handle, look like the properties in some ancient ritual. The only thing wanting was that the men who waved them should have been in masks. One of the old men waved them towards the distant harbour: the other continued to blow, to yell, to howl—what shall I call it?—frantically. The groans of a dying elephant may be as terrible; but, terrible though the noise was, the wind was blowing in the wrong direction, and the little harbour seemed to remain undisturbed in a dreamy sleep. Then the old man with the trumpet said suddenly to the old man with the bushes: "I see a man running down over the sand." And the old man with the bushes said to the old man with the trumpet: "I see two men running." The old man with the trumpet said: "There are four now." And the old man with the bushes replied triumphantly: "They're coming like flies."

And, indeed, if you looked down towards the harbour, you saw tiny dark figure after tiny dark figure running down to the sand towards the edge of the water, tumbling into little boats, and rowing out to the long black boats in which men fish for pilchards. Then out of the harbour came the procession of long boats, rowed with many oars, the blades rising high above the water after every short, slow stroke. I do not know in what kind of boats the ancient Britons went out to fight their neighbours, but I should not be surprised to learn that it was in just such long black boats as those in which the pilchard-fishers go out to surround the pilchards with their seine-nets to-day. Here, in a world of modern inventions, there was nothing that might not have existed in the days of King Arthur. It made the bay seem strange and silent, as though one were watching events in a dream.

Alas, it was a false alarm. Either that, or the pilchards had been frightened out to sea by the trumpet. The boats rocked about in the wind for hours, and then the crews tumbled disconsolately once more into the little boats, and were pulled back to the quay. I was glad, however, to have seen the stage set with such antique trappings for such an antique play. The play will go on, for men will still desire pilchards, but there will be no old man with a trumpet, no old man with white bushes, no men plodding slowly out to sea in the long, black boats. Instead, there will be a wireless apparatus to give quicker warning, and motor-boats to cut off the pilchards, which come swiftly and swiftly go, before they can escape.

Will the new method with the much more wonderful apparatus seem as wonderful to new eyes as the old method seems to ours? This question rose in my mind again a few days later, when I saw the first herring-boats of the season moving out of the harbour without a sail up. At least, some of them had a tiny sail as big as your hand near the stern—a nominal sail, of which I cannot tell you the name—but all of them now have motors, and the herring-fleet no longer leaves harbour like horses coming out on a race-course or like loosed pigeons, but crawls forth like a brood of mechanical toys on a nursery floor, with the energies of machines taking the place of the energies of men. Can it be that these motor-boats will one day seem beautiful and old-fashioned and strange to those who have never seen the brown and dirty sails chasing each other out round the island at the rising of the moon? Will associations be strong enough to make a man remember these soulless and sailless boats till the end of his days as part of the life of the sea, by the side of which his every heartbeat was a holiday when he was a boy?

It may be mere sentimentalism, but there are some of us who can never see an old way of doing things passing without regret. It is as though we should like to see change permitted only in unimportant things, such as sanitation and politics. We preferred the horse-bus to the motor-bus and the open turf fire in the kitchen to the black range. The country scarcely seemed the country after the disappearance from the kitchen of that flaming bonfire with the round black four-footed pots

hanging over it from hooks. The closed range that took its place may have been more efficient ; but it was dull, dark, and cold to the imagination. The fire was no longer good company in itself, like a dog or a cat. Imprisoned in the range, it was now merely a useful thing, like a watch. And to-morrow the very fires in our rooms may have disappeared in the same fashion and have given place to gas and electric contrivances and central heating. I like to think that these things, too, may one day seem friendly and personal, and that a man a hundred years hence may recall with a pang of tenderness the hot-water pipes in the corner of some quiet little room when he was a boy. As some new invention takes their place, he, too, will cry pleadingly, " Survive ! survive ! " But the hot-water pipes will be deaf to his cry, and no house will ever seem home to him again as home once was.

Thus, everything that a little outlives its day—every survival from the passing world —seems charming, delightful, something almost too good to be true. One of the things that I deplore most melancholily in the modern world is the disappearance of the old ballad-singer, wretched though his voice was and wretched his wares. If I meet a ballad-singer to-day, I am as grateful as for a vision of Utopia. To plunge into the imperfect future is a cold business compared with a plunge into the absurd and imperfect past. Even the ballad-sheets that are still occasionally sold on the streets are a restoration of the happiness of yesterday. I came on one during the week that delighted me, not because it was literature,

but because it took me back to days when hawkers traded in verse among their other toys. It was on the death of Marie Lloyd and began :

'Twas the Peg Woffington incident enacted once again,
A well-known public performer couldn't stand the strain.
A renowned footlight favourite determined to play her part,
Though sick unto death, for she was devoted to her art.

Matilda Alice Victoria Wood, to give her full, proper name,
Was born in Hoxton, destined soon to climb the ladder of fame,
Destined to rise in her profession, become comedy's queen sublime,
To win both fame and fortune, in the shortest possible time.

After describing the early childhood of Marie, the poet rises on a tide of emotion :

Had she been thrown suddenly upon some remote desert isle,
She'd have warbled, sang to the birds, tried to make them smile.
Her first engagement was a local one, at a neighbouring Music Hall,
When she was an unqualified success from rise to curtain's fall.

What could be nobler than that picture of Marie singing to amuse the birds on a hypothetical desert island? But the poet also pays a fine tribute to her generosity in the crowded ways of men. As he sings :

Her generosity was proverbial, as boundless as the tide,
Her purse was always ever open, no one was ever denied.
She'd an army of pensioners, who called every Saturday night,
And she never once failed them, to the many recipients' delight.

Any poor old broken-down " pro," they never went away unheard,
In the parlance of the stage, she ne'er gave a single one the " bird,"
Were it possible to enshrine a heart of gold, in a human frame,
'Twould have certainly been peerless Marie's, our heroine of fame.

Happy London to be still the scene of such ballads ! Does it not restore London to us as a country town, before trams were, or taxicabs in the long, dismal streets ? But, alas ! ballads are disappearing, like sails and horses, and the world is not what it once was and probably never will be. Meanwhile, the sight of an old custom or an old institution enables us to indulge in the pleasures of memory—in the pains and pleasures of regret.

## XXVI. Things We Remember

ONE of the most notable characteristics of the modern dweller in towns is the economy of memory he is forced to practise. It is allied, I fancy, to economy of observation. The townsman lives in a world that is full of such a number of things that he is bound to pass most of them with his eyes, to all intents and purposes, shut. In a smaller world, the human being observes and remembers, to put it roughly, everything. If he seldom travels beyond his own tiny village, he remembers the name of every shop, the position of every house and every tree. He knows his village as a child knows its nursery. The child in the nursery remembers, as something important, every detail of the pattern of the wall-paper, however crowded with flowers and figures; it remembers the door-handle, the bell-push, the arabesque on the fender, the tiles in the fireplace, the handle of the coal-scuttle, with as clear a vision almost as if it were actually looking at them. Its environment is still so limited that it is not yet beyond the range of one human being's capacity for being interested. Similarly, when it hears or reads a story, it seizes on every name and every detail of age or colour with what seems to older people miraculous keenness of memory. It is dangerous to tell a child a story that it already knows unless

you can repeat it with something approaching verbal exactitude. I heard a man the other day quoting a story from "Punch" in the presence of his nieces and being twice pulled up by them because of his inaccuracy. "Did you see that story in 'Punch,'" he began, "where little John had been quarrelling with his sister Betty?" "Her name was Doris," the smaller of the children corrected him. "Well, anyhow," the uncle resumed, for he was telling the story to a grown-up, "John came up to his mother, holding out a sixpence——" "It was a penny," protested the other child miserably. Now, it did not matter as regards the point of the story whether the sister was called Doris or Betty, or whether John, who had called her a fool and had come to pay his fine, wanted change for sixpence or change for a penny. But to the children it mattered immensely. They were at an age where everything still seems worth noticing and worth remembering, and to call Doris Betty was to perpetrate as gross a blunder of observation as if a man were to come back from a visit to the House of Commons and to describe Mr. Bonar Law as a short, stumpy, bearded man with the eye of an eagle.

Nor is it only when we are children that we have this passionate love of minute and (as we afterwards learn to believe) negligible details. Who that was ever stage-struck as a boy does not remember how every name on the play-bills used to stand out as if written in letters of gold? I, for one, could have passed an examination in the names of all the actors and actresses in the Benson or the

Compton Comedy Company twenty-five years ago. I could have told you who played the part of the First Citizen and who the Page and who the Butler who had only ten sentences at the rising of the curtain. The programme in those days was engrossing reading, and we studied every name and every descriptive line in it with as eager a curiosity as if it had been Holy Writ. To-day, alas! I could sit comfortably through most plays without so much as a glance at the programme. If the play is very well acted, I may remember three or four names when I have left the theatre, but the minor parts are no longer filled for me by wonderful artists with memorable names, but by a number of anonymous actors and actresses who are of less significance to me than the telephone-numbers of my friends. Similarly, when I came to London first, I could have reeled off the name of every play running, of the theatre at which it was being performed, of the authors and of the chief actors and actresses appearing in it; but now that it has become necessary to practise economy of memory, I doubt if I could give you the names of six current plays, or tell you who wrote them, or at what theatres more than two of them are being performed. I do not remember—a lapse once unthinkable—what is "on" at Daly's Theatre or what at the Gaiety, though I pass each of these theatres several times a week. Nearly all the actors and actresses whose names I now know I knew more than ten years ago. Of those who have made their reputations during the past ten years the names of fewer than ten have stuck in my memory.

This, no doubt, is partly due to the loss of what was once an intense and incessant interest. But it seems to me an extraordinary thing that I should be able to pass a huge building such as the Gaiety Theatre almost daily and yet retain in my memory not a single word of the bills and posters that I must have read, if it was only unconsciously, again and again. Stay; there is one name that seems to float out of my subconsciousness into my consciousness as I write. I seem to see the name "José Collins" printed on a bill in large letters. But I am not sure even of that. I would not give evidence about it under oath.

It is possible, of course, to explain this blindness to the things about us, not as economy of observation, but as sheer laziness. I reproach myself almost daily on the score of laziness when, passing through the Temple, I am stopped by some lost fellow-creature and asked the way to Paper Buildings or Pump Court. I find that not once in twenty times can I be of assistance. Again and again I have read the name of each several court and block of buildings and hilly laneway on my way through; again and again I have looked for the elm in Elm Court and the fig-tree in Fig Tree Court, and looked in vain. But, in spite of such casual curiosity, I have no map of the Temple in my memory. If I set out to call on anyone in the Temple, I have to ask my way. I do not even remember for more than a week at a time that in the middle of Elm Court there is a tall lamp with red glass and the words "Fire Plug" printed on it in ugly letters. I can close my eyes, sitting here at my desk,

and see the Temple clearly as I pass through it at the gate near Essex Street and walk towards the eastern gate at the top of Temple Avenue. I can see a fountain, plane-trees, steps, arches like mouse-holes, brick the colour of wine in sunlight, barristers' names painted up in black in long lists beside the entrance to each office, railings and lawns of grass leading down towards the river, but I cannot in my memory call the courts through which I pass or the narrow lanes that I cross by their names.

This, I think, is carrying economy of memory too far. Yet who of us in passing through even the London streets that we know best is not guilty of the same indolence? I do not know how many people pass along the Strand daily. Is there a single one of them who could tell you the names of all the shops on both sides either in their right order or in any order at all? Is there a single one of them who could tell you the names of fifty shops? How many could name you one shop in ten, apart from restaurants and public-houses (in regard to which economy of memory is practised but rarely)? Do you know how many bootshops there are in the Strand? Or how many tailors? Addicted though you are to patent medicines, could you even give the names of the few chemists who dispense beneficent poisons between the Griffin and Charing Cross? Yet, if the Strand were an isolated village and you an inhabitant of it, you would remember all these things without difficulty, and you would know not only Denny's bookshop but the kind of shop that was on each side of it. You would know them without even making an effort

because there would not be thousands of other details pressing themselves on your attention and on your memory at every turn. The memory, however, seems to be a cup which, if held under even the most generous and continuously flowing tap, cannot be filled fuller than full. The villager's cup is filled, and so is the Londoner's, but most of what is poured into the Londoner's tap flows over the sides of the cup and down the waste.

There are people who appear to believe that nothing is ever really lost to the memory—that everything that is once seen or heard is registered somewhere in our being, that our conscious memory is only part of our memory. It is an attractive theory for those of us who have bad memories. To forget all the good books we have read so as to be unable to repeat twenty consecutive lines of poetry seems less of a disaster, if everything is stored up, however elusively, somewhere at the back of our minds. And, indeed, it can hardly be doubted that, the more books there are to remember, the less we are able to remember them. I do not know whether scholars still believe that Homer's epics were handed down from generation to generation, not in writing, but by word of mouth. It is easy to believe, however, that when literature was still no bigger than a big village, men could remember it with a villager's or a child's accuracy of detail. Students of folk-lore have heard from the mouths of peasants (unable to read or write) stories which tallied almost word for word with stories existing in ancient manuscripts. The human memory, I imagine, would find little difficulty

in remembering even so long a poem as the "Iliad" if there were not libraries of other books and daily and weekly papers claiming its attention in rivalry. The modern man, however, is compelled to forget. He would forget, indeed, even if it cost him an effort to do so. How appalling it would be if he had to go about burdened with everything he read in the morning paper! He would stop reading papers altogether if he did not know that he can so easily forget what he has read. There are men who, after reading a column of a newspaper once, can repeat it word for word, but we do not envy them. If we admire them it is as freaks, not as men we should like to imitate. We regard the gift for remembering insignificant things as being somehow in conflict with the gift for remembering significant things; and, even when we deplore the fact that our own memory is not all it might be, we would not exchange it for a mechanical memory of this kind, however perfect. We should like to improve our memories, but only on condition that they will continue to pick and choose with true economy among things to be remembered. We should like to be able to remember a few more telephone-numbers—though how we remember so many numbers as we do is a thing at which I never cease to marvel—but to remember the entire telephone directory including all those thousands of numbers of people we do not know and, with luck, will never ring up on this side of Jordan—could there be a drearier or more maddening doom?

## XXVII. Joy-Bells

THERE is always a good reason for ringing joy-bells. Joy-bells are a denial of experience—an assertion that there is something better than experience and that, when we have grown tired of the world as it is, we have only to take wing for the world of hope in order to arrive at something better. True, we have often spread our wings in the past for that fascinating star, and we have always found ourselves beaten back to earth again by the storm-wind of the impossible. Even then, however, we console ourselves with the reflection that we may have travelled a few leagues of air that no mortal wing ever invaded before. We are more encouraged by the few leagues that we have travelled than we are discouraged by the million leagues that still remain virgin of the presence of man. We tell ourselves that, at least, a start has been made, and we compare ourselves triumphantly with Caliban, who had not even the first buddings of a wing on his beastly shoulders. It is then that we become optimists. It is only when we shift the comparison from Caliban to the angels, who can travel on a beam of light from the handle-star of the Plough to the most glittering of the Pleiades in less time than it takes to write these words, that we begin to despair. We have, as the old song says, "got a long way

to go," and the imagination grows giddy at the thought of the chasms that must be crossed where no bridge or roundabout pathway has yet been discovered. Giddiness, it may be, is a matter of temperament or of want of practice. Some men can sit and dangle their legs over the steepest precipice in the Alps and feel no swimming sickness in their bones. I remember reading a description of such a scene by Mr. Wells in a book he wrote on Italy in war-time. Even to read the passage was enough to make one giddy. Mr. Wells, it is clear, has a good head, and can face the journey not only from cliff to cliff, but from star to star with less trepidation than you or I would feel in walking across Hyde Park after sunset. It was only recently that he took up in a Sunday paper the accusation that he was setting out for the star of the perfectibility of man. Most of us have long given up toying (except on New Year's Eve) with so vast a heresy. We no longer ask, "Is it possible for man to become an angel?" but "Is it possible for man to become less of a devil?" Mr. Wells, however, is one of those fortunate men for whom it is New Year's Eve all the year round. He dislikes the Old Year as some people dislike a strange cat in their garden. He "shoos" it away in one book after another. He can think only of the good time coming and of the appalling fact that nobody seems to be making any preparations for it. If he takes us back into history, it is not in order to flatter us with the suggestion that all that accumulation of Old Years was good, but in order to show us that, if we are still a little lower than the

angels, we are also considerably higher than the Cro-Magnons. That is as far as he will go in the direction of pessimism—that and, perhaps, an uneasy suspicion that, though man is perfectible, he is so stupid as to be incapable of achieving the perfection within his grasp. Even with this dark doubt playing hide-and-seek in his mind, however, Mr. Wells still dreams of a perfect star, with human beings piloting it through space. On at least one day in the year we can share his vision. On the approach of a New Year, we, too, can believe in something better than experience has justified us in hoping for. We at least acquiesce in the ringing of the joy-bells, and we should miss them if the world were silent at midnight on December 31st.

It is possible, indeed, that on other days we set too much store by experience. After all, experience itself has taught us that experience is no safe guide through life. Speculation has again and again set men's minds on fire in defiance of experience, and on the heels of speculation has come discovery. Experience is a territory that is constantly enlarging its borders, and it would be foolish to be too sure that it will never extend them far enough to overlap with Utopia. It is the laziness of our imaginations that makes us turn away from speculating on these distant possibilities. In practice it may be that this laziness of ours has its uses. If it is important that we should speculate on what we may be, it is also exceedingly important that we should remember what we are, and those who speculate too exclusively on man as he may be are in danger of being

tempted by the desire to persecute man as he is, as if you could put man as he is on the rack and elongate him into an angel. Hence the excesses of many political and religious idealists. Now, ideal men are admirable inventions, but when they are used to work havoc and injury among real men, we are less certain of their virtue. The ideal man is intolerable except as a friendly figure, hailing us from higher up the path. When once he begins to lie in wait for us as an enemy, we beat a retreat into the depths of reality, and refuse to resume our march to Utopia until the ideal man has withdrawn into his own kingdom out of ours. This may be a mark of cowardice on our part, but it is thus that we are made. It is the idealist who drives us away from the ideal which we might otherwise have timidly approached. Indeed, an ideal is secure only while it is recognized as an ideal and not thrust upon us or mistaken for our immediate destination. The attempt to drag the real up to the ideal usually results in dragging the ideal down. Or we may compare the ideal to the sun, which gives us light and warmth, but is beneficent only if we keep at a safe distance from it. We are not salamanders that we could live in closer proximity to such ardent fires. There are many misguided idealists who talk as if, in refusing to precipitate ourselves into the sun, we were dishonouring the light. They are willing not only to be consumed themselves but to see everybody else consumed in flames so divine. As a consequence, the world has again and again suffered at the hands of idealists torments as terrible as it has ever suffered at

the hands of wicked men. "Hitch your wagon to a star" is perilous advice if taken too literally by men unaccustomed to dashing through space among the comets. Find your way by a star, but, if you are wise, you will stick to horses for purposes of locomotion. As a matter of fact, to use a star as a beast of burden is deleterious to the star as well as dangerous to yourself. To guide the State by a star—what nobler height of statesmanship could be imagined? To hitch the State to a star—good heavens, what jolting, what runaway recklessness, what an ultimate crash!

Thus it seems that we can unite experience with hope only if we take care to keep them separate. There are some persons incapable of experience who live entirely on hope. There are others incapable of hope who live entirely on experience. The first leads to revolution, the second to reaction. The average man is too uncertain of anything to commit himself to either extreme. Hope pulls him in one direction and experience in another, and he moves now one way, now another, like a participant in a well-matched tug-of-war. After all, how can he rely even on experience, when experience has so often let him down? Experience taught him to be as suspicious of everybody as the "man fra Sheffield" in "A Pair of Spectacles." Experience made him a cynic who saw through every apparent virtue to the ugly self-love that was at its source. Experience told him that the only way to make men respect you is to make them fear you, that war is a biological necessity, that human nature never changes, and that to believe in anything better than

already exists is to chase rainbows like a child. The truth is, experience has led him into quite as many bogs as experiment. It taught him that the sun went round the earth and made him doubt the circulation of the blood or the possibility of building an iron ship. Experience, indeed, changes from one generation to another—a thing which alone would be sufficient to make it an unsafe guide, though a useful consultant. Experience told Mr. Balfour not many years ago that it would be ruinous to give the Boers self-government. Experience tells Lord Balfour that the grant of self-government to the Boers was a triumphant success. Hence, if a wise-looking man appeals to experience in support of an opinion, we have the right to ask him, "Whose?" Your experience is not the same as mine. We are, both of us, witnesses with imperfect powers of observation, with imperfect memories, with imperfect judgments. Two employers with years of experience will flatly contradict each other on such a matter as the effect of education on industry. Two doctors will dispute as to the effect of alcohol on human beings in general. You will find that, even on subjects in regard to which every test of figure and experiment seems to have been made, such as vaccination or inoculation against typhoid, rival disputants will produce rival statistics that suggest that either one or both of them must be lying. In a controversy it is safest to assume that both are lying. Not that there are not a few things that can be infallibly tested by experiment. There are certain chemical facts on which all chemists without exception are agreed. We know for

certain a number of facts in geography, such as the exact distance between London and Brighton, and even a number of facts in history, such as (though on this point I am less certain) the exact date of the Battle of Hastings. But the facts of human nature, the facts of politics, the facts of religion, can be subjected to no such infallible tests. Whatever we believe about them, even if we only disbelieve, is largely an act of faith. Doubt and despair, like hope, are born in the imagination—some say, in the digestion. Experience is simply an unprincipled witness who will give evidence on either side. Hence, if on New Year's Eve something calling itself experience bids you moderate your transports about the good year that is coming, do not abandon hope on the word of so untrustworthy an adviser. Experience knows as little as does hope what 1924 will be like, and hope paints the more delightful picture. After all, who could have foretold that in 1923 grocers and taxi-drivers would already have recovered their pre-war courtesy? Miracles do happen, whatever the doubters may say. Hence it is not a wildly unreasonable hope that in 1924 other classes of human beings will become sane and even revert to the ancient charities. It is a wicked world, but the eye of faith can foresee a time when it is going to be as good as it used to be. This, I know, cannot be achieved without effort, but cannot we on New Year's Eve at least make a resolution to make the effort? And, if you conjure up a still more resplendent vision of a world in which the lion has lain down with the lamb, and hatred and poverty and sorrow have been found to be curable

diseases, I, for one, shall accept the evidence of your triumphant joy-bells as evidence of things to come, no less valid than the modest tinkle of my own. After all, it is you with your joy-bells who do things. You do not do all you think you are going to do, but you do something, and at least you go on ringing joy-bells at the beginning of each New Year.

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